

Reading History Backwards:  
Vietnam between China and the West,  
1995-1885

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## Introduction

1995 will be a momentous year for anyone with a Vietnamese memory. We shall start in April with remembering that it is twenty years since Saigon was captured by North Vietnamese forces. In June we shall mourn the 'loss of country' that was sealed in 1885, when the Chinese emperor signed the Franco-Chinese treaty of Tianjin, endorsing the French protectorate over Tonkin and Annam, which had been established the previous year. In August we shall commemorate the fifty years' anniversary of the great Vietnamese revolution of 1945, and, on 2 September, President Ho Chi Minh's proclamation of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

1995 may also be a year of change itself. The country has these last years been through an economic, social and cultural transformation of great magnitude: the introduction of a market economy; the virtual privatization of ownership to land; a remarkable growth in trade and foreign investments; military withdrawal from Cambodia and serious cuts in the armed forces; normalization of relations with China; an application to become member of ASEAN; an end to 29 years of U.S. embargo; an upsurge in arts and literature; tremendously increased contact between Vietnam and its vast diaspora; the adoption of a new constitution, and the institution of a whole set of new laws. Such changes use to create social and political dynamite, but so far the old revolutionary veterans have accepted social and economic change and remained in power. Political repression persists. The young and middleaged are still kowtowing to the veterans, but at some point within the next few years they will have to take the step from their current domination of economic affairs to responsibility also in the political domain. Unfortunately, far too little is known about the mentality of the people who are going to take over. (The first who stopped kowtowing, Tran Xuan Bach, was thrown out of the party in 1990.) This essay tries to establish, on the basis of Vietnam's geographical position and modern history, what the new generations *may be going to think* about Vietnam's

position in the world. It is a piece of speculation, lining out some possible mental maps, spatial as well as historical.

Through many centuries there was just one really powerful external power in the universe of the Viet people: the Celestial Empire with its centre in Beijing. The kingdoms further south and west--Champa, Angkor, Siam, Luang Prabang--were much smaller and significantly weaker. But from the 17th century, a new source of influence emerged: light-skinned people with guns, bibles, Indian opium and a small easy-to-learn alphabet, arriving with ships from the West. Vietnam, which at this time was also torn internally between a north-based and a south-based aristocratic dynasty, was dragged into the 19th century wars between China and the West. As an effect of the industrial revolution the strength of the Westerners relative to the Chinese grew rapidly, leading to Vietnam's colonisation in the years 1858--85. The strength of the Westerners continued to grow until they started fighting each other in two "world wars" and China finally overcame a long period of internal decay and strife, effectively uniting under a modern centralized regime in 1949. From then on the West was on decline.

'Vietnam between China and the West'. This title was chosen for a seminar held at the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies in Copenhagen from 19 to 21 August 1993. It proved to be controversial among the Vietnamese. One reason for this is psychological: Vietnam--in the view of the Vietnamese--is important in itself and not just something between anyone else. The most high-ranking of the Vietnamese participants at the seminar made a telling remark in the evening after it was over. We took him to a Vietnamese restaurant in Copenhagen and served him a dish we thought was Vietnamese. "*This*", said our guest in polite disdain, "is really between China and the West".

Yet the seminar was attended by almost a hundred scholars related to the field of Vietnam studies. This essay is to a certain extent built on that seminar's papers, conversations and discussions, none of which I shall quote, however. Some of the papers were historical while others dealt with contemporary affairs. This

presentation shall start with the present and ask: How does the dilemma between China and the West manifest itself in today's Vietnam?

### **The contemporary dilemma**

The dilemma is present in many domains:

*Ideologically* the old Vietnamese leaders are in a similar situation as their Chinese comrades. Both regimes survived the collapse of world communism in the years 1989-91. Hanoi and Beijing have both toned down their marxism-leninism and adopted elements of Western ideology (market liberalism/rule of law). On the other hand, they have also both tried to draw on the Confucian tradition in insisting on the need for social harmony and political stability. Both states have rejected pluralist democracy and have not only retained, but also legally codified, severe restrictions on the basic freedoms. The state and its laws are meant to protect the people as a whole not only against external dangers but also against mistaken individuals within the Chinese and Vietnamese societies. The dangerous influence of the West is in the official press of both countries denounced with a negative term which translates as "peaceful evolution". Ideologically there are thus good reasons why the present Vietnamese regime should move closer to China, particularly since the Russians—and other East Westerners—have deserted the communist cause. But then both the Chinese and Vietnamese communist parties have tried to redefine their ideology in *national* terms. Mao has had a renaissance as a symbol in China, and the Vietnamese have all but supplanted marxism-leninism with a set of ill-defined principles called "Ho Chi Minh thought". These thoughts may well be used to advocate good relations with China, but they do not constitute a common ideological ground under the two states the way marxism-leninism did in the past. For a brief period before the failed coup in Moscow in 1991, it seems that Beijing sought to establish a new socialist camp, and a little while after that, it was Hanoi's turn to probe into the possibility of setting up a socialist alliance

with China, Laos, North Korea and Cuba. Nothing, however, came out of either attempt.

Leaving ideology aside, and moving on to the *political system*, China and Vietnam are also quite similar and face the same concerns. Both states have adopted a set of laws protecting the interests of foreign and domestic investors. These laws have been prepared in a political process that has increased the importance of the legislative branch of government and more generally strengthened the state in relation to the communist party, and for the interpretation and enforcement of the new laws it has been necessary to increase the efficiency and independence also of the judiciary. The role of the communist party in everyday matters has thus been reduced, and the party faithful now seem to face serious recruitment problems. Party membership engenders more obligations and less privileges than before. Both regimes, however, have categorically declined to accept a multi-party system or fully democratic electoral practices. The success of the western-style elections in Cambodia pleased neither Beijing nor Hanoi although China was relieved to see Sihanouk win and Hanoi to see the Khmer Rouge lose face. As far as their political and administrative systems are concerned, the Chinese and Vietnamese leaders share two additional concerns: the requirement to prevent the army from taking over too much of the nationally unifying role of the party, and the need to counter regionalism and avoid a general breakdown of central government authority. In neither country is the capital also the centre of the main growth region. Both capitals thus have to impose taxation on distant resourceful regions and redistribute resources to less developed areas. Ideological and political concerns thus seem to go hand in hand. In neither domain does the present Vietnamese regime feel closer to the West than to China.

If we move on to the *cultural* domain, the picture remains much the same. The two countries share many of the same traditions, both with concern to high culture (Confucianism) and popular beliefs and rituals (astrology, ancestor worship, daoism, buddhism), and they are exposed to the same dangers and attractions from Western-style materialism and individualism. However, the cultural

exchanges between China and Vietnam were interrupted in the ten years from 1979 onwards. Although there is at the moment a tendency in some intellectual circles to return to the shared classic Confucian tradition, it is doubtful that the national cultures will come anywhere near a merger. This could probably happen only as a result of a very conscious policy involving elaborate use of modern media, and such a policy is wholly unlikely to be pursued. If not for any other reasons, Viet fears of giving too much influence to the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam is a brake on cultural rapprochement. Culturally the two countries are developing in parallel, and on the basis of a shared tradition, but not jointly.

Much the same can be said of the economy. China was first out with its economic reforms in 1979, and Vietnam has since tried to do very much the same that China has done. But there are few mainland Chinese investments in Vietnam (less than 6 mill USD by June 1993, which is just a tenth of the Swedish investments). Also very little of China's and Vietnam's major recorded exports are directed towards each other. The leading investors in Vietnam are Taiwan and Hong Kong. Each of them have invested more than the double of any other country. Japan has still not made up its mind whether to carry out its many plans and has so far invested less than Australia and France.<sup>1</sup> The great bulk of Vietnam's officially registered foreign trade goes to or through Singapore or Hong Kong. Since 1988, however, a substantial, but largely unrecorded border trade has developed between Vietnam and China. Indeed the inflow of cheap Chinese products is a serious concern to the Vietnamese authorities: local Vietnamese enterprises are often unable to compete with the Chinese products, and capital is drained out of Vietnam and into southern China. Rumours say that the Vietnamese unofficially compensate for this by exploiting their long standing relations with Russia. Russian technology is said to be imported by ship from Vladivostok to Haiphong and resold to various buyers in China. If this is true, these unofficial trade routes

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<sup>1</sup> Figures from the office of the State Committee for Co-operation and Investment (SCCI), June 1993.



must be a continuous source of worry to the governments of both countries. If Hanoi builds its outlook on the world on statistically recorded trade, however, the Chinese People's Republic does not loom large. What really counts for Vietnam is to take up the *competition* with China for Western, Japanese and South Korean investments and get access to the American and European markets. A strong backer of Vietnam's attempts to compete with China is Singapore. Hanoi and Singapore see things very similarly these days, and in 1992 Senior Minister Lee Kuan-yew became official advisor to the Vietnamese government.

Vietnamese *foreign policy* focuses more closely than in the past on economic development. One of the Foreign Ministry's main goals is to establish relations leading to investments and market opportunities. Thus Vietnamese foreign policy aims at improving and intensifying relations with western countries and Japan, and obtaining membership in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). ASEAN membership is seen both as a way of strengthening Vietnam's relations with the region's more advanced growth countries and of acquiring a Southeast Asian identity for Vietnam itself. Closer ties and eventual membership in ASEAN have become such an important goal that ASEAN sometimes appears in the rhetoric as if it were a bloc forming a counterweight to China.

If we move on from foreign policy to *military security*, it is impossible to maintain an exaggerated vision of ASEAN's importance. ASEAN is just a loose association, a secretariat with negligible influence, a yearly meeting of foreign ministers and now a "common security forum" to discuss regional security with invited external powers. It is a paradox that the tightly knit European Community should at present be seen as a failure and the loose ASEAN a success. One reason for this must be a lower level of expectations as far as ASEAN is concerned, and also the fact that the ASEAN member states have maintained surprisingly friendly relations among themselves for more than two decades while Europe is unable to cope with war in the Balkans. When speaking of regional security, however, ASEAN is not much more than an expression of the relations that its member states have



with each other. From the Vietnamese viewpoint, China appears, after the sharp reduction in the Russian naval presence and the withdrawal of the US Navy from its bases in the Philippines, as the one and only great power in Vietnam's proximity. Unless the United States, Japan, or possibly India, should take the unlikely decision to establish a strong naval presence in the South China Sea, the only possible way of promoting Vietnam's security is to accommodate China. This is what Vietnam has tried to do since 1991. Party, Army and Government have all tried to nurture close relations with their Chinese counterparts. The "anti-Chinese" foreign minister Nguyen Co Thach was removed in August 1991. At the same time the 'pro-western' Foreign Ministry lost its representation in the politbureau. Chinese encroachments of the border and provocations in the South China Sea have been met with only verbal protests from the side of Vietnam, and with patient attempts to negotiate. Even more importantly, Vietnam has accepted developments in Cambodia that involved a flow of ethnic Vietnamese refugees across the border and the undoing of a regime that Vietnam had invested ten years of military efforts in propping up.

Based on what has just been said about how Vietnam sees its region from the economic, foreign policy and security perspectives, I would like to suggest that the actual policies of Vietnam are formulated in confrontation between two basic outlooks, one based on economic interest and a quest for diversified foreign relations, the other on military security. The first is grounded in the Foreign Ministry and the offices of the Prime and Deputy Prime ministers. The second has its protagonists in the military establishment, represented by President Le Duc Anh (elected September 1992) as well as the party organisation and the various ideological institutions.

The differences between the two concepts can be illustrated by juxtaposing two maps of East- and Southeast Asia (figures 1 and 2). On figure 1 we see the Vietnamese security map, with its lack of a counterweight to China. The threat perception is the traditional one of a Chinese pincer with one arm coming down through Laos and Thailand reaching into Cambodia and the other constituted by the

# VIETNAMESE SECURITY MAP



FIGURE 1

# VIETNAMESE ECONOMIC & FOREIGN POLICY MAP



FIGURE 2

fastgrowing Chinese navy in the South China Sea.

Figure 2 shows the Vietnamese economic and foreign policy map with Vietnam between China and ASEAN, strong links to Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan and South Korea, and hopes of closer relations with Japan. This figure reflects the official view. If we add concerns for inofficial channels, we must modify the map by including the Chinese border trade, and also the unrecorded importation from Vladivostok.

When drawing a picture of one's place in the world, one will normally operate both in space and time. The map gives space. History gives time. Let us now move into time and read history backwards in a search for situations comparable to the one that faces Hanoi today.

### Reading history backwards

Historians are rarely willing to make predictions, but this does not mean that history is useless for politicians. Contemporary situations can indeed only be properly understood if situated in a historical context. This is true for several reasons:

First, the present situation has its *causal origins* in developments of the past. It clarifies our understanding of a situation to know how it evolved.

Second, the actors whose actions we try to understand have historical *memories*. They operate on the basis of past experiences and on the histories they have learnt from parents, teachers, books and mentors. To understand how actors think, we must know the histories—or stories—they remember, and how they remember them.

Third, history offers a wealth of situations more or less similar to the ones we face today. Some past situations are often evoked, thus becoming part of actors' active memories—even sometimes becoming 'syndroms'. Other historical situations are largely forgotten although they might be enlightening. By bringing attention to interesting historical analogies, the historian can enrich political debates. History is an arsenal of political arguments. The task of the historian is to bring them forward, safeguard

their precision and the accuracy of the facts that they use. Any argument which is in conflict with factual historical evidence, is a bad argument.

The dilemma between China and the West is not new in Vietnamese history. There are many historical analogies to be made. But which historical situations are most fruitful to look into? Let us move gradually backwards and consider some key years in Vietnamese modern history:

Although a third of the Vietnamese population has been born since, all important members of the powerholding elite remember that victorious year of 1975, but not only with pride and joy. Their thinking about 1975 is likely to include a nagging feeling that the origins of later failures may be found in the overconfidence that victory brought about. The South-Vietnamese regime had been destroyed, and the United States inflicted its first defeat ever in war. Socialist Vietnam was admired throughout the world for its endurance. For most of 25 years Hanoi had been able to get assistance both from China and the Soviet Union for its drawn out struggle. In the first years after 1975, Hanoi wasted its prestige and its good relations with China by carrying out heavy-handed reforms leading to an exodus of ethnic Chinese and by following an inflexible foreign policy leading to a one-sided alliance with Moscow. Hanoi managed to antagonise virtually every power of importance except the Soviet Union: China, Cambodia, USA, and all the countries in ASEAN. The lesson of 1975 seems already to have been learnt. Pride is no virtue. Arrogance is a sin. The great culprit in today's Vietnam is Secretary General Le Duan who led the country until his death in 1986. There is a strong feeling in Hanoi that the history associated with the name of Le Duan must never be allowed to repeat itself. Hanoi has now gone to the opposite extreme and seeks to turn all former foes into friends: Singapore, Thailand, France, the United States, China.

Let us move ten years further back, and consider the start of the war with the United States in 1964--65. Le Duan wielded power also then, but in 1965 Ho Chi Minh was also still alive. The judgment of what they did at that juncture will depend on the choice of perspective. If new elites in Hanoi adopt an overall national viewpoint, with

consideration for the interests of the Vietnamese people as a whole, with emphasis on its security, social and economical well-being, then Hanoi's confrontational policy towards South Vietnam and the United States will appear to have been disastrous. It led to so much death and suffering and prevented South Vietnam from having an economical development of the kind that happened in South Korea. However, if the next generation of Hanoi's leaders retain *national unification* as the axiomatic value on which their historical judgments are based, then it will appear that Hanoi played its cards well in the mid-sixties. Had it not used the occasion then, there would never have been any unification except on South Vietnamese terms. In the mid-sixties, the internal Chinese power struggle before Mao's cultural revolution made it possible for Hanoi to achieve Chinese aid for the insurgency in South Vietnam although the unification of Vietnam under one regime was not really in accordance with Chinese national interest. Mao was using support for national liberation struggles as a means of fighting his rivals in the Chinese Communist Party and of promoting China's position as a leading force in the international communist movement. This went before more cold-blooded concerns for the national interest. The Soviet Union had little to lose on Vietnam's unification provided it did not lead to a world war with the United States, and responded to Hanoi's requests by matching China's support. Thus Hanoi was able to capitalise both on internal struggles in China and on the Sino-Soviet rivalry. The situation in 1965 must have come to some of the Hanoi leaders' mind in 1990 when Sino-Soviet relations had been normalised and Sino-American relations were in crisis after the crackdown on Tian An Men square. It must have seemed possible then to rebuild the relationship to Beijing while retaining the one with Moscow and return to the old balance act between the two communist giants. But the Cambodia problem was in the way of a solution, and then came the collapse of the Soviet Union which virtually disappeared as a serious player in Southeast Asia. Today, the situation of 1965 thus seems largely irrelevant. It will become relevant again only if Russia regains strength.

Let us therefore take another jump backwards and look



at the situation facing the Democratic Republic of Vietnam at its foundation in that most crucial of all years in 20th century Asia: 1945. Immediately upon its establishment, Ho Chi Minh's regime had to face the dilemma 'between China and the West'. In accordance with an ad hoc decision at the conference of the Allies at Potsdam, Indochina was divided in a northern Chinese occupation zone and a southern British one. Thus the territory of the new republic was occupied by Chinese (Guomindang) troops in the north and by British in the south. The British brought the French with them and helped them organise a counter-revolution, partly with the help of the surrendering Japanese troops. In the north, however, it took five months before the Chinese allowed the French to return in force, and then under the condition that they first sign an agreement with Ho Chi Minh. Ho Chi Minh had nurtured relations in many Chinese quarters since he first arrived from Moscow to Canton back in 1925, and the communist-led Viet Minh league had been built during the Second World War with support from the warlord of Guangxi province, to some extent also from the American OSS. From September 1945 to December 1946 Ho Chi Minh's government was able to perform a complicated balance act between China and France, but then Jiang Jieshi's government was absorbed by its preparations for civil war. When the French authorities in Saigon decided to crush the Vietnamese republic in late 1946 and establish a more pro-French regime, China did not intervene. The result was eight years of anti-colonial war. It ended with the momentous defeat for the West at Dien Bien Phu because a recently reunified communist China was again able to substantially support the struggle of its Vietnamese little brother. The situation of 1945-46 was of course much different from that which prevails today; in 1995 there will not be any foreign troops on Vietnamese soil, but the failure and success of Ho Chi Minh's balance act include a number of episodes that can stimulate general discussions of Vietnam's position between China and the West.

The next jump is shorter, only five years, but then five violent years. We stop in 1940, with French Indochina manoeuvring between China, Japan, Britain and the United States. From the viewpoint of present day Hanoi, it is

perhaps difficult to identify with the preoccupations of the French regime in Hanoi during the colonial period. But in security matters the French Governor General had most of the same concerns that since 1954 have preoccupied the Secretary General of the Vietnamese Communist Party. The French regime was also based in Hanoi. Vietnamese history would be just a little bit poorer if the country's politicians and historians refrained from drawing on experiences in the period when a Western regime represented the national interest in relations with China, Thailand (Siam), Japan, Indonesia (the Netherlands), Singapore and Hong Kong (Britain) and the United States. Northern Vietnam formed the main avenue for the transportation of arms and other provisions to the hard pressed Chinese Guomindang regime which was in its fourth year of resistance against the Japanese invasion. In 1939, Japan had occupied Hainan and the Paracels. Now it demanded of the French regime that it close the border to China and accept permanent Japanese inspection of the border region. What could Hanoi do? France itself was about to succumb to the German onslaught. If French Indochina wanted to survive, it could either ask Britain and the United States for help thus severing its ties with occupied France, or it could bow to the Japanese demands. Hanoi tried first to ask for help, but neither Britain nor the United States was prepared to go to war against Japan for the sake of Indochina (the war between Japan and the West, of course, broke out only a year later). Thus the French regime chose to accept the Japanese ultimatum. By allowing Japan to place its troops in Indochina and use the colony's military and infrastructural facilities, the French regime was able to survive through most of the Second World War. It was only because it ultimately failed in March 1945 that the August Revolution became possible. Interestingly, French Indochina never joined Japan in its war against the Allies and maintained diplomatic relations with Jiang Jieshi's regime in western China until late 1944. From 1940 to the spring of 1945 the border between Indochina and China remained garrisoned by French, not Japanese, troops.

1940 was perhaps a strange year to stop in. That year does not of course provide any parallel to the dilemmas

that face Hanoi today. Japan is at present primarily an economic power, and China is infinitely stronger than it was then. But should China again become divided against itself and Japan feel compelled to defend its access to oil and other resources through a strong naval presence in the South China Sea, then... (may providence forbid).

The last and largest jump brings us all the way back to the situation leading up to the Sino-French treaty of Tianjin in 1885. The empire of Dai Nam<sup>2</sup> had lost its southernmost provinces to France in the years 1858-67, and in 1874 had been obliged to sign a treaty with France which the French understood as giving them the rights of a protecting power. The wise but not so vigorous Emperor Tu Duc was old and had no son or other obvious heir. He tried to diffuse French power by diversifying his foreign relations through approaches to Britain, Spain, Siam and other powers, but indulged in these attempts too late. The other powers had already tacitly recognised French preeminence on the east coast of the Indochinese peninsula and therefore declined to give support. Tu Duc's main recourse was therefore on a weakened China. Through the whole of the 19th century, the Nguyen Dynasty (1802-1945) had secured its internal sovereignty and its right to expand southwards by strictly maintaining its obligations as a tributary power in relation to the court in Beijing. Tributes were sent regularly. In 1877 Tu Duc sent his usual tribute thus reaffirming China in its obligation to protect Dai Nam in case any protection should be needed. Tu Duc had thus no less than two protectors, a Chinese protector he wanted and a French one he did not want. In 1882 protection was called for. A rebellious Chinese general held troops in Tu Duc's northern provinces, and Tu Duc was unable to get rid of them alone. He thus had to choose between his two protectors. The choice fell on Beijing which sent units of its regular armies to Dai Nam to oust the rebels. France also intervened militarily, however, and the situation in

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<sup>2</sup> Dai Nam (Great South) was the official name then for the state which in 1945 was given the name Viet Nam (Viet South) and which the Chinese used to call An Nam (Peaceful [or Pacified] South). The name Viet Nam was also used on some occasions in the 19th century.

Tu Duc's northern provinces turned into a mess. Amidst the turmoil, the emperor died and Dai Nam entered a crisis of succession. France now went to war both against Dai Nam and China and bombarded two major Chinese ports. In 1884, a French protectorate was established over the Hue emperor's two domains (Annam and Tonkin). At first, Chinese troops intervened to prevent the protectorate from becoming effective, but since China was at this time also under pressure from Russia and Japan over Korea, the Chinese Emperor decided in 1885 to write off Dai Nam, renounce on his right to tribute and leave the Viet to the West. Shortly afterwards, French troops occupied Hue. Dai Nam had succumbed to France.

Instead of entering a complicated discussion of Tu Duc's succession it is time to get back to the present and draw some tentative conclusions.

## Conclusions

History cannot be used to make accurate predictions. Men and women are free to make other choices than the ones we have reason to expect. They often do so, and history never quite repeats itself. But history does matter as an essential part of the present. Historical situations form a part of the mental frameworks of the persons who choose and act. From which historical situations do the Vietnamese political elite seek input for the way they see the relationship to China and the West today?

Probably the most fruitful and also most likely historical parallel among those mentioned above is the one most distant in time: the process leading up to the 'loss of country' in the years 1883-85. It is fruitful as a basis for reflection about current options since it offers a kind of 'worst scenario' against which current policies can be measured. Tu Duc failed in his attempt to strike a balance between China and the West. He failed to acquire Western technology, failed to set the different Western powers up against each other, failed to ensure his succession, failed to maintain internal cohesion, allowed rebel and secret

armies from the Chinese border region to ravage his northern provinces, and relied on a Chinese emperor who was not in a position to fulfil his obligations. As a result Dai Nam was colonized by France.

The fruitfulness of the Tu Duc analogy is of course like any analogy limited. Conditions are different today. But the experience of Tu Duc might be useful precisely for those in Hanoi who want to succeed where he failed: in carrying out economic and social change while maintaining political and administrative stability. The Tu Duc experience may be as much on the mind of today's powerholders in Hanoi as the stubbornness of the Empress Dowager has preoccupied Deng Xiao-ping. This may indeed have stimulated the old communist's astounding willingness to liberalize the Chinese economy.

History does not only offer analogies and arguments, but also makes it possible to draw lessons of a more permanent kind. The history of Vietnam in the last 110 years—and even beyond—seems to give ground for five such lessons as far as the security of the state is concerned:

1. Economic performance matters more than armed strength in promoting sustained security. Arms frighten. Money attract. This is a lesson that Hanoi seems to have drawn from the mistakes of the years 1975-79.

2. China is always there. National security in Vietnam can be achieved only through good neighbourly relations with China. Today's leadership in Hanoi appear to have concluded that a return to the hostility of the 1979-91 period should be avoided even if the cost is high.

3. Unrest in China boosts Vietnamese leverage in relation to China, but also increases the danger of dependence on the West. Furthermore it makes it tempting for Hanoi to act in ways that might lead China to take revenge when it has regathered its customary force. Although stability in China compels Vietnam to be more cautious in its foreign policy than some Vietnamese decisionmakers might have preferred, stability in China is in the best interest also of Vietnam. The best of all worlds for Vietnam is a world with a non-aggressive and stable China.

4. No Western power can be relied upon to



counterbalance China. The West is a great source of technology, markets, entertainment and ideas, but the West is also generally unreliable. Western powers come and go: Spain, Portugal, Holland, France, Britain, the United States, and Russia. Hanoi appears to have concluded that it is in their best interest to diversify relations with the West as much as possible and never become dependent on any one Western power.

5. No Asian power can be relied upon to counterbalance China. The same that applies to the Western powers also applies to Japan, to India and the Southeast Asian states. The end of European colonialism and of the American hegemony in Southeast Asia gave rise to a number of independent states who in turn joined together in ASEAN. It may well be in Vietnam's interest to become a member of ASEAN and achieve a Southeast Asian identity, but not if this becomes part of an alliance with the West, with India or Japan against China. From Hanoi's perspective, no one can be relied upon to counterbalance China.