
UNIT 20 VIETNAM

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20.1 OBJECTIVES

The unit deals with Vietnam, a communist country in Southeast Asia, which became famous in following possibly the bloodiest independence struggle it led against colonial rule and later, against direct military intervention by the United States of America. The key to understanding Vietnam is its history and the armed struggle it waged under the leadership of the Communist Party. As far as the objectives of this unit are concerned, after going through this unit you should be able to :

- talk about the history of the country, including its struggle for independence.
- discuss the difficulties in unification of Vietnam and its impact on economic development.
- discuss the constitution and government of Vietnam.

20.2 INTRODUCTION

Vietnam is one of the three countries of Indo-China in Southeast Asia. Apart from its fascinating history of long subjugation by the external powers, it has to its credit a nationalist movement unparalleled in history. It was under the Communist Party of Vietnam and the leadership of Ho Chi Minh that the Vietnamese fought against the Japanese occupation during the Second World War and later against the French (who were driven out by the Japanese) who tried to regain their control over their former colony. After defeating the French forces at Dien Bien Phu led by the guerrilla forces of General Giap in 1954, Vietnam was divided into two countries under the Geneva Accord. The promised election to ascertain the opinion of the people was not held and the Americans sent large number of troops to fight the Vietnamese communists. It was part of the strategy of global containment of communism in the world. But, it proved to be possibly, the worst disaster for the Americans. Although Vietnam was subjected to one of the worst kinds of military aggression by the world's mightiest power, the United States, the Vietnamese national fervour could not be subjugated. At the end of nearly twenty years of war, Americans had lost about 55,000 troops in the war against Vietnam and finally had to make an ignominious exit in 1975.

After a resounding victory, however, Vietnam had to face serious problems relating to the unification and re-building of the war ravaged land. Also because of ideological rivalry between the Soviet Union and China, Vietnam's former supporters, it had problems. Due to circumstances, Vietnam had to side with the Soviets who provided

generous economic aid. The collapse of the communist Soviet Union and unsatisfactory performance of the economy, Vietnam recently had to adopt certain capitalist measures of development. At present, Vietnam is undergoing a rapid transformation on almost all fronts. It now seeks closer relations with the anti-communist Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), its formal rivals China and the United States. It has now embarked upon a liberalised, market-oriented economic policy.

20.3 EARLY HISTORY

There is nothing much in the early history of Vietnam except languishing under the Chinese rule marked with sporadic violent uprisings for independence. In 207 B.C., in the aftermath of the collapse of Chin dynasty in China, Trieu Da, a Chinese general commanding the Kwantung and Kwangsi provinces brought the Red River Delta as well under his jurisdiction, carving out an independent kingdom called Nan-ueh or Nam Viet. After the liquidation of the Nam kingdom in 111 B.C., Nam Viet was turned into a Chinese province and kept under its suzerainty for the next thousand years. Large number of Chinese came to settle down in the Red River Delta and introduced Buddhism, Confucian values and Chinese culture into Vietnam.

20.3.1 Medieval History

In the medieval history of Vietnam, two families dominated the scene, the Trinh and Nguyens, related to each other but political rivals. Until the fifteenth century, the kingdom of Daico-Viet was limited in territory, more or less to the Tongking Delta. After a major defeat of Champa in 1471, the Vietnamese state extended to little south of the Annam range. Vietnam's partition took place for the first time in 1540. This was when Vietnam's ruling Le family, supported by a nobleman, Nguyen, suffered a serious setback with a general, Mac Dang Dung, seizing power in Tongking. A Chinese mediation supported partition of Vietnam. However, by 1592, another nobleman, Trinh, overthrew the Mac regime in Tongking and usurped power in the name of Le Dynasty. Trinh managed to smuggle the nominal Le ruler from Hue to Hanoi. As the suzerain power, China undid the previous "partition", recognising the Le Dynasty as the only legitimate ruler of all of Vietnam. But the Nguyens could not be liquidated. A wall from the Annam mountains to the sea near Dong Hoi separated the territories under the control of Trinh and Nguyen families.

Nguyen power grew rapidly after removing the Trinh threat. The final extinction of the remnants of the Champa Kingdom came in 1720, its last king fleeing with most of his people to present day Cambodia. The Vietnamese extended their control in the Mekong Delta of Cochin-China, then a part of Cambodian khmer kingdom. By the middle of the eighteenth century, virtually all the Khmer territories of the present southern Vietnam had become part of the Nguyen kingdom.

20.3.2 Upheavals during the Last Quarter of the 18th Century

Vietnam witnessed great social and political upheavals during the last quarter of the 18th century. The old established regimes were overthrown both in the North and South. The three brothers Nguyen Van Nhac, Nguyen Van Lu and Nguyen Van Hue (who adopted the name of the southern ruling family Nguyen) from Central Vietnam raised the banner of revolt; in part helped by public disgust of Trinh's regime which was corrupt and nepotistic. By 1788, they had obtained control of all of Vietnam. Nhac was proclaimed Emperor of Annam with Hue and Lu in charge of Tongking and Mekong basins respectively. Though these three brothers brought about the unification of Vietnam, they did not enjoy much respect in the South, where people considered them unscrupulous for taking advantage of the original Nguyen king dying without leaving an adult heir. The teenage prince, Nguyen Anh, received sympathy and secret support from the people.

20.3.4 Beginning of Interactions with the French

A French missionary, Pigneau de Behaine, beginnings of interactions with the French, one of the supporters of Nguyen Anh, took Anh's son, Canh, to France to the court

of Louis XVI, seeking military assistance for restoration of Nguyen Anh to power. Despite political convulsions the monarch was undergoing just before the French Revolution in 1789, a Franco-Vietnamese treaty was signed, providing French military aid in exchange for grant of monopoly for external trade, the cession of Puolo Condore island and the port of Da Nang. The French government directed its colonial governor of Pondicherry (near Madras) to provide military assistance, an order he failed to carry out. De Behaine, however, raised 300 volunteers and funds in Pondicherry—enough to purchase several shiploads of arms. He arrived in Vietnam in June 1789, barely a month before the fall of Bastille which marked the beginning of the French Revolution.

Even before the arrival of French help, Nguyen Anh had captured Saigon in 1788. By the time he conquered Hue in 1801 and Hanoi a year later, there were only four Frenchmen in his army. However, the French helped in the construction of Vauban-type forts, casting better and larger cannon and creating a navy. Nguyen Anh was proclaimed emperor of Annam in 1892 with the title of Gia Long, signifying the political unification of the Tongking and Mekong deltas. In the following years, he sent a tribute to the Chinese court and for the first time China recognised the Nguyen dynasty. Credit should be given to Gia Long who successfully reconstructed the war ravaged country, including a road covering the distance of 1,300 miles linking Saigon, Hue and Hanoi. He was without doubt not only the unifier of Vietnam but also its greatest monarch ever.

20.4 COLONIAL RULE

Though the French connection with Vietnam could be traced back to the seventeenth century, the colonisation as such did not take place till the second half of nineteenth century. Consistent interest in proselytisation had resulted by the end of 18th century in about a quarter million Vietnamese converts, mostly in the coastal provinces. Large-scale persecution of converts and missionaries began in the 1820s under Minh Mang and was continued under Thieu Tri (1841-1847) and in the early part of Tu Duc's reign (1847-1883). The hostility towards the Catholics was further enhanced by continued missionary involvement in Court politics. The close association of the missionaries with semi-independent, rebellious Governor of Cochin-China who attempted to prevent Minh Mang's succession to the throne when Gia Long died in 1820, earned them the extreme wrath of the monarch. Minh Mang forbade in 1825 any further entry of missionaries. Eight years later, an extremely severe decree ordered churches to be demolished and made profession of the Catholic faith an offence punishable by death. This was in 1836 and it almost coincided with Chinese strictures against foreign shipping. The Vietnamese monarch closed his ports to European shipping.

20.4.1 Persecution of Missionaries and French Intervention

Persecution of missionaries became an excellent excuse for the French to intervene directly in Vietnam. In 1846, French ships blockaded Da Nang for two weeks and then bombarded the port, demanding the release of Mgr. Dominique Lefevre, who had been condemned to death by the Vietnamese government. The French government of Napoleon III also wanted to use the opportunity to compensate for his domestic fiascos by success in Cochin-China. The new French imperialism of the time was widely based on a coalition of diverse interests of the Church, traders and manufacturers in search of new markets, and was aided by an egoistic Emperor's lust for colonies for augmenting national power and prestige. The business interests were aware of the exclusive geographic advantages their position in Vietnam could give them particularly with regard to seeking access to the lucrative markets of interior China. French businessmen interested in overseas markets were supporting the government of Cochin-China in the hope of establishing a base in Saigon rivaling Singapore and Hong Kong for funneling South China trade.

20.4.2 Treaty of Tu Duc

including Saigon, to France and assured that no part of his kingdom would ever be aligned to any other power except France. He further agreed to pay an indemnity of four million piastres in ten annual instalments and open three ports into French trade. Christianity was to be tolerated in the future and there would be the right to navigate the Mekong. Five years later, the French obtained the remaining provinces of Cochin-China to enable them to establish full control over the Mekong delta. The treaty of 1873 provided France the excuse to pressure the Vietnamese emperor for more concessions, for the French alleged that being a French protectorate, Vietnam committed a breach by giving tribute to China. Utter helplessness forced the emperor of Annam to become formally a French protectorate, to surrender administrative responsibility for the Tongking province to France and to accept a French Resident at Hanoi and Hue. After a prolonged fight and defeat, the Middle Kingdom of China signed a treaty in 1885 recognising the French protectorate over Annam and Tongking, permitting French traders in South China, conceding preference to France over all other European powers in Yunnan and granting France the right to construct a railway paralleling the Red River Valley from Hanoi to Kunming. The treaty marked the end of nearly two thousand years old subordinate relationship between Vietnam and China and completed the French domination over all of Vietnam.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answers.
ii) Check your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

1) What were the factors that led to the intervention by the French in Vietnam?

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2) What are the main aspects of the French colonial rule in Vietnam?

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20.5 NATIONALIST MOVEMENT

Southeast Asia is unique because probably this is the only part of the world that has witnessed the presence of almost all the colonial powers at some time or the other : the French in Indochina (Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos), the British in Malaya, Singapore, Brunei and Burma, the Dutch in Indonesia, the Americans in the Philippines and the Portuguese in East Timor. Whole of the region also came under Japanese rule during World War II. Equally significant were the nationalist movements across the region which ranged from one of the bloodiest in Vietnam to the most peaceful in Brunei.

The Vietnamese history is replete with examples of large-scale movements to overthrow Chinese rule at various times. In Vietnam, like the rest of Southeast Asia, education played the most important role in creating nationalist consciousness. Many of the elite who were educated in the West came under the influence of various ideologies, particularly Marxist, and came back to their native countries to lead the nationalist movements, many a time, militant. Other events that fuelled the nationalist sentiments were: the Boxer Uprising in 1899 against Western presence and domination of China; the resounding military victory of Japan over Russia which shattered the myth of invincible Western power; the successful overthrow of the decadent Manchu dynasty in China and proclamation of the Chinese Republic in 1911; the Russian Revolution in 1917 which for the first time resulted in the establishment of a proletariat state under the leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union; and the nationalist struggle in India. But, more importantly, it was the Japanese defeat of all metropolitan powers that were present in Southeast Asia and occupation of the region that acted not only as a catalyst but provided the necessary inspiration to the nationalist movements.

Although opposition to the French rule started as soon as the French occupied Vietnam, it was in the early 20th century that propelled the independence struggle to greater heights. Many youths from well-to-do families who had the benefit of education in France and who had crossed over to China after the Chinese Revolution in 1911 instigated a number of small uprisings, particularly in Tongking and Cochinchina, and a somewhat serious one in 1916, all of which were severely suppressed by the French rulers. In the 1920s many underground secret organisations were set up, both Marxist and non-Marxist. But the most important event in the recent history of Vietnam was the entry of the legendary Marxist, Ho Chi Minh, in the nationalist struggle. He had gone to Europe as a cabin boy but soon got inspired by Marxist and other socialist writings. After spending some time in Moscow, he went to China in 1924 to organise the nationalist movement on communist lines. In 1925, he formed the Association of Vietnamese Revolutionary Youth and started training hundreds of people in Marxism. In 1930, Ho fused the three prominent communist groups in Vietnam into a single party and named it the Indochina Communist Party. This was in line with the dominant thinking that a united nationalist movement could be built up comprising all the three countries of Indochina.

An abortive and ill-planned uprising led by a prominent non-Marxist organisation, called Vietnamese Nationalist Party (founded in 1927), in early 1930 was brutally suppressed by the French. The efforts by the Indochina Communist Party (ICP) to exploit the peasant unrest by organising strikes and non-cooperation movements were also suppressed. However, the ICP could quickly reorganise itself because of its superb organisation and party discipline. The ICP took advantage of the liberal political situation in France to organise a broad Democratic Nationalist Front under the leadership of Pham Van Dong and Vo Nguyen Giap aimed at uniting all social classes and political groups. With the outbreak of war, the Popular Front government fell in France resulting in the banning of ICP.

20.6 VIETNAM AND AMERICAN INTERVENTION

During World War II, after a brief clash between the French and Japanese forces, Japan and the Vichy government of France came to an agreement which provided for the continuation of French sovereignty and administration in Indochina in return for placing military facilities and economic resources of Indochina at Japan's disposal. Ho Chi Minh was released from a Chinese prison on Chiang Kai-Shek's order to enable him to lead a resistance movement in Vietnam against the Japanese-dominated Vichy government. He was provided with military and other material supplies. Meeting of the ICP which met in China in May 1941 decided to launch an agrarian movement. A new organisation, the Viet Minh, or the Vietnam Independence League, was launched to include all people without distinction of age, wealth, sex, religion, or political outlook with the sole aim of liberating the country. A military force under the leadership of Vo Nguyen Giap consisting of 5,000 people was constituted. After taking over the administration of Vietnam from France in three months before surrender by the Japanese, Viet Minh had already established guerrilla bases and administration over six provinces. Vietnam occupied Hanoi close on the heels of

Japanese departure and Ho Chi Minh declared independence for the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV). Interestingly, the whole programme that was adopted on that eve was nationalist and not communist in character. This can be seen from features, such as abolition of inequitable taxes, gaining of independence, developing a military, promulgating democratic rights, redistribution of communal lands and friendship with the Allies. In fact, when Ho Chi Minh addressed a crowd of half-a-million to proclaim the birth of Democratic Republic of Vietnam, he quoted largely from American Declaration of Independence of 1776.

The new republic was however not recognised by any country and the Allies, meeting at Potsdam, decided to put northern part of Vietnam under Nationalist China and southern part under the British. The British, after releasing the French prisoners, put France in charge of administrating the South. The French tried to reassert their colonial rights in Indochina.

20.6.1 French Ambitions and Designs

To get rid of the Chinese troops, Ho Chi Minh announced the dissolution of ICP and offered to share power with other independent organisations in late 1945, mainly to get French recognition. Though France also agreed to sponsor a referendum for determining whether Cochin-China should join the Union and to withdraw its troops gradually from all of Vietnam, it did not show any desire to give up power. On the contrary, France started strengthening their military and political position. Upon backtracking on referendum, it announced the creation of an autonomous Republic of Cochin-China. Finally, on 23 November the French cruiser *Suffren* bombarded the Vietnamese quarter of Haiphong, killing over six thousand persons in a matter of few hours. That sparked off the outbreak of hostilities between Viet Minh and France. The first Indochina war, which lasted from 1946 till 1954, broke out both in North and South Vietnam. What attracted the people in a big way was more the militant character of the Viet Minh than the communist ideology per se.

The fight that continued all across Vietnam resulted in heavy casualties on both sides. Many cabinets fell in France because of Vietnam war. The French forces were thoroughly demoralised, particularly, by the public opinion at home, which overwhelmingly pressed for ending the "dirty war". Apart from losing lucrative rubber and rice supplies, the French were worried about the impact of Vietnam's independence on other French colonies, especially in Africa. But in the end the French had to face a humiliating defeat at Dien Bien Phu on 7 May 1954 at Viet Minh hands led by General Giap, a primary school teacher, who became one of the greatest guerrilla fighters. The French rout resulted in the Geneva Agreement of 1954 whereby Vietnam was divided into North and South along the Seventeenth Parallel and the question of reunification were to be decided by a country-wide election in 1956.

20.6.2 Vietnam and Shadow of the Cold War

The unimaginable suffering the Vietnamese had to undergo probably could have been avoided had the Cold War not been brought to Vietnam and big powers avoided the power play. The elections were to be supervised by an International Control Commission under India's chairmanship, with Canada and Poland as members reporting to Britain and the Soviet Union, the co-chairmen of Geneva Conference. America, committed to the policy of containment of communism, created a regional security organisation called the South-East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) in September with the U.S., Britain, France, Australia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Pakistan as members. SEATO's Article IV included the countries of Indochina as "protocol" countries to be defended by SEATO powers, thereby legitimising later American intervention in Vietnam conflict.

20.6.3 American Support to Ngo Dinh Diem

With active American support, Ngo Dinh Diem, who was appointed Prime Minister by the French while the Geneva Conference was in session, declared himself as Chief of State after rigging a referendum held on October 1955. Soon, he proclaimed South Vietnam a Republic with himself as the President. Diem also announced plans for a unilateral election of a national assembly in March 1956 by repudiating any obligation to the Geneva Agreement. The republic was recognised by the U.S. and its

allies and for all purposes treated as an independent country. In fact, Diem had neither popular mandate nor was he in touch with the people.

Intoxicated by the American support, Diem ruled like a dictator distributing largesse to his close kith and kin. As a Catholic, and thus unduly favouring Catholics, in a predominantly Buddhist country, he further distanced himself from the common people. He ruthlessly persecuted both the communists and the non-communists, whenever they showed even the slightest opposition. Because of his ill-conceived agrarian policies, he could not contain the simmering discontent of the peasants. The communists in order to liberate and unify the country established the National Liberation Front (NLF) in South Vietnam in December 1960. Americans simply turned a blind eye to the socio-economic problems by extending full support to Diem. By the time they realised Diem's unpopularity, a Buddhist resistance had snowballed into a major crisis in the early sixties. They did not discourage when the military generals overthrew president Diem and assassinated him. But, that did not solve the basic problems of South Vietnam. On the other hand, the intra-military fight for power among generals, who were exclusively dependent on the U.S. for help and support, further aggravated the situation.

20.6.4 Tonkin Incident of 1966

The Tonkin Incident of 1966, when an American ship was attacked by North Vietnam close to its coast while on a spying mission, was the only excuse Americans needed to escalate the war beyond all proportions. By 1968, the U.S. had committed more than half-a-million troops. The Americans who were pitted against the aroused nationalism of Vietnam inflicted devastation upon that country on a scale which had no parallels in history. The U.S. dropped more than seventy lakh tons of bombs on Indochina—nearly three times the total tonnage of bombs dropped in World War II and the Korean war combined—plus one lakh tons of defoliants and other noxious substances. About 8,000 U.S. planes and helicopters were destroyed. The direct U.S. war expenditure in Vietnam was more US \$150 billion. Americans used all possible experimental weapons such as chemical, gas, napalm, phosphorous fragmentations weapons and bacteriological weapons. 'Agent Orange', 'Carpet bombing', 'Lazy dog', and a variety of other appellations were invented and used extensively in Vietnam as new modes of devastation. Dykes, bridges, and canals were bombed and destroyed so that people would flock to urban areas which could be more easily managed. Defoliants were sprayed on crops and forests to deny food and shelter to the guerrillas and carpet bombing was done to wipe out the villages.

By the time the Americans realised that Vietnam War was unwinnable, they had lost more than 58,000 men, but had at the same time killed more than forty lakh Vietnamese. More than the humiliation of defeat, even today the U.S. is haunted by psychological trauma of what is called the "Vietnam Syndrome". The Vietnam debacle was also the beginning of a definite American decline. On the eve of departure, it was reported that the 5-lakh U.S. Expeditionary Force had become "a drugged, mutinous, and demoralized rubble". In 1973, Paris Talks were held as a face-saving device for the Americans to withdraw from Vietnam. In the spring of 1975 the communists won not only in South Vietnam, but also in Cambodia and Laos. On 2 January 1976 South Vietnam formally unified with the North to become of a single country once again.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answers.

ii) Check your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

1) Briefly explain the genesis of the nationalist movement in Vietnam?

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United States in 1975 and a reunification of North and South Vietnams. However these events created more serious problems than anticipated. The socialist pattern of economic development could not simply be extended from North to South Vietnam. South Vietnam under the American tutelage had been modeled on market-oriented free-enterprise system primarily geared to serve the American war machine. Once again, because of large-scale war, the human settlement was drastically disturbed denying Viet Minh a chance to extend its influence to the rural areas. People were encouraged to move to the cities, basically Saigon, thus disrupting the traditional agro-based economy of Vietnam.

20.7.3 Social Problems

In addition, the communist leadership had to tackle insurmountable social problems which were ramifications of American military presence. They had to deal immediately with one million soldiers of the South Vietnamese regime. These soldiers were demobilised and remained largely hostile to the victors. In addition there was the problems of one million civilians who were working in various capacities for the former regime. There were about two million unemployed peasants who had flocked to urban centers under the forced urbanisation programme during the war. By the time the Americans left, Vietnam was beset with many social problems. As the whole economy was solely propped up by American support, it collapsed as soon as the Americans left.

20.7.4 Problems Created by Hurried Unification

A hurriedly pushed through unification of two divergent parts, developing on two opposite models, had its repercussions on the social and economic contours of development. The communists over enthusiasm virtually eliminated the enterprising mercantile class, primarily ethnic Chinese, who were either forcibly resettled in rural areas, or had to flee the country in shanty boats—the so called “Boat People”. The biggest disaster in South Vietnam centred on collectivisation.

20.7.5 Internal Problems

By mid-seventies, the American intervention ceased but not Vietnam's problems. By 1977 border skirmishes started with the notorious Pol Pot and his clique ruling Cambodia and as a result a serious rift with its nearly four-decade old mentor, communist China. Because of various reasons, Vietnam was forced to get closer to the Soviet Union ideologically and depend heavily for economic assistance. The dependence on Moscow and East European communist countries did not help Vietnam's economy. In fact, it had a negative effect.

20.7.6 Perestroika in Vietnam

After the introduction of Perestroika in the former Soviet Union by Gorbachev which resulted in an aid cut, and partly because of disappointing economic performance, Vietnam had to change its economic strategy. Because of collectivisation, the agricultural output sagged, and the performance of industry was disappointing. The highly centralised command economy coupled with Western ban on aid and embargo on trade because of its military intervention in Cambodia in late 1978, and the collapse of the Soviet Union left Vietnam with no option but to go the whole hog its own version of Perestroika. Since the introduction of reforms since 1987, foreign investments are gradually increasing providing much needed fillip to the industry. Reforms in agriculture have enabled Vietnam to emerge one of the largest exporters of rice by early nineties. A major stumbling block for a full recovery was American ban on aid and trade. Recent political developments have finally resulted in the American decision to lift the trade embargo on Vietnam and has opened the way for the restoration of diplomatic relations between Vietnam and the United States.

Compared to its ASEAN neighbours, Vietnam is backward economically, but its progress in education and health, despite poverty are highly commendable. After waging a nationalist struggle unparalleled in history and ultimately humbling world's mightiest power, it is unfair to discredit it as “backward” by ignoring the intensity and destruction of the war. Again, because of past, its recovery and progress are bound to be slower compared to any other developing country. Recent measures are expected

Check Your Progress 3

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answers.
ii) Check your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

- 1) What were the main characteristics of economic development adopted by the Communist Party of Vietnam?

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- 2) What is the new strategy adopted for economic development in Vietnam in recent years?

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20.8 CONSTITUTION AND GOVERNMENT

Like other communist systems, Vietnam is also governed primarily by the Communist Party of Vietnam, which sets the socio-politico-economic agenda and takes major policy decisions. A small core group called the Politburo is the most powerful body consisting of most influential members of the party's leadership.

There is a Central Committee below the Politburo which periodically meets and gives broad direction to the party and the Politburo. The Congress of the Communist Party, which is generally held once in three to four years, consisting of party delegates from all over the country, is the most important where any change in the leadership of the party, including Politburo and Central Committee, is brought about as well as thorough review of the party's and government's functioning. It is the Congress that provides guidelines till the next Congress is held.

Congress also elects the Central Committee which in turn elects the Politburo and the Politburo chooses a General Secretary for the Communist Party. Though the communist party's powers and authority are more pervasive, it is different from the government.

20.8.1 New Constitution

A new constitution, the third one, was adopted in 1980 which is still currently in use, but is soon to be replaced with necessary modifications. The National Assembly is an elected body but with no legislative powers. There is the powerful Steering Committee of the National Committee, called a Council of state. The executive powers are vested in a Council of Ministers which is headed by a Prime Minister. Additionally, there are National Defence Council, the supreme military authority, and a Supreme People's Court, headed by a Chief Justice.

20.9 FOREIGN POLICY

Since Vietnam won independence under the leadership of the communist party, it adopted a radical posture in its foreign policy dealing with the ASEAN countries which were pro-U.S. and pro-capitalist. Vietnam depended heavily on the Soviet Union and China for political direction and economic help. Though Vietnam tried to maintain equi-distance from the Soviet Union and China which were at loggerheads on the question of ideology, it did not succeed. Various factors, particularly those pertaining to Cambodia under the genocidal regime of Pol Pot which chose to side with China, led Vietnam to move closer to the Soviet camp. After its military intervention in Cambodia in late 1978, the anti-communist ASEAN countries found a good excuse to isolate Vietnam. Because of close friendship, Vietnam also offered military bases at Da Nang and Cam Ranh Bay to the Soviets. Because Vietnam was instrumental in overthrowing the Pol Pot regime in Cambodia, China attacked Vietnam in early 1979 to teach it a lesson. However, the changes that have occurred in East Europe and the Soviet Union in recent times have forced Vietnam to modify its foreign policy. Vietnam has withdrawn all its troops from Cambodia and is in the process of liberalising its economy. Relations with ASEAN countries have improved considerably in the recent past, so also with China. It is likely that soon diplomatic relations will be re-established with the United States too. Vietnam today is more interested in alleviating its economic backwardness rather than pursuing revolutionary goals.

Check Your Progress 4

- Note: i) Use the space given below for your answers.
ii) Check your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

1) Describe briefly the role of the Vietnamese party in the government.

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2) Assess the foreign policy objectives of Vietnam.

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20.10 LET US SUM UP

In conclusion it may be stated that Vietnam has a special place in the recent history of not just Southeast Asia but also the world. Its uniqueness lies in its struggle for independence: first against the Chinese who had subjugated the country for more than thousand years: second, against the French colonial rule: third, against the Japanese during World War II: fourth, against the French once again when they tried to reoccupy the country: and finally, against the Americans who resorted to massive military intervention to defeat the communist led nationalist movement.

To the credit of the Vietnamese, they defeated all those powers that tried to subjugate

States, which Vietnam achieved after waging a guerilla war. Of course, the consequences of the war were very grave which could not be overcome easily. Vietnam's military intervention in Cambodia led to its diplomatic isolation and its main supporter, the former Soviet Union, disintegrated itself. Vietnam at present seeks to have friendly relations with its former foes and runs the economy on capitalist lines without, however, doing away with the political role of the Communist Party.

20.12 SOME USEFUL BOOKS

Chester A. Bain, *Vietnam : The Roots of Conflict* (New Jersey : Prentice Hall, 1966).

D.G.E. Hall, *A History of Southeast Asia* (London : Macmillan, 1981).

George Mc T. Kahin. *Government and Politics in Southeast Asia* (New York : Cornell University Press, 1967).

Noam Chomsky, *At War With Asia : Essays on Indochina*, (New York : Pantheon Books, 1970).

Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam : A History* (London : Century Publishing House, 1983).

20.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See Section 20.4 and Sub-section 20.4.1
- 2) As Above

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See Section 20.5 (National Movement)
- 2) See Section 20.6 (VietMinh & the American Intervention)
- 3) See Sub-section 20.6.5

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) See Section 20.7
- 2) See Sub-section 20.7.6

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) See Section 20.8
- 2) See Section 20.9