

## Vietnam and The United States: Reconciliation from A Distant and Bitter War

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Mention Vietnam to almost any American over the age of 60, and the conversation will usually be about the war. It appears that the Baby Boomers still have the words “Vietnam” and “War” eternally frozen together in their minds. The Vietnamese do not. What they call the “American War,” is slowly slipping from this country’s collective consciousness. This also could be due to the fact that the average age in Vietnam is 29.2. The war is a distant memory to the more than 66 percent of the population born after the war concluded (Central Intelligence Agency, 2015). However, there are still remains of the war present in many places – the infamous Hanoi Hilton is now a museum complete with John McCain’s flight suit, the tunnels of Cu Chi have been widened so the much bigger American tourists can gain entry, and other changes made to accommodate western visitors. Americans might be surprised to learn that fifteen years ago when U.S. Secretary of Defense William Cohen visited Vietnam in 2000, he was welcomed at Noi Bai Airport outside Hanoi with a color-guard flying the stars and stripes and playing the Star-Spangled Banner – a surreal sight for anyone who grew up during the war. If you take a walk through Ho Chi Minh City you will find many American fast food chains, including McDonalds, Burger King, Popeyes, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Pizza Hut, Domino’s, Pizza Inn, Starbucks, etc. It also might surprise many Americans – especially those who fought in the war – that Vietnam is considering a military alliance with the United States (“U.S. Military Chief Visits Vietnam,” 2014). As Tuong Lai, a former adviser to two of Vietnam’s prime ministers recently stated, “We cannot fight Chinese encroachment alone. Political isolation in a globalized world is tantamount to committing political suicide for Vietnam. And the key ally for Vietnam today is the United States” (Lai, 2014, para. 4). Yet some bitterness remains from a war that claimed the lives of over 58,000 Americans and over two million Vietnamese (U.S. National Archives, 2008). It is important to understand the dynamics of these two nations’ developing cordiality against the backdrop of waning painful memories in

order to put into context the significance of “sticky” issues which continue to linger in the collective consciousness.

### The Post War Years

Following the collapse of Saigon and the end of the war, Vietnam tended to isolate itself from the rest of the world (Cima, 1990). From 1975 until 1986, economic conditions in Vietnam were harsh. Vietnam was one of the few countries to experience a drastic economic deterioration in a postwar reconstruction period. Inflation was running at 700 percent a year, and millions of farmers were in danger of starvation, and it was only aid from the Soviet Union that kept the downward spiral from becoming a death spiral (Cima, 1990). However, this was inevitable based on the situation after Reunification in 1975. The country was devastated; there were over two million military and civilian deaths, 15 million homeless, and 60 percent of homes in the south destroyed (Murray, 1996). Vietnam launched numerous economic reforms; the most significant were collectivism of farming in the south and nationalization of all manufacturing and most services (Griffin, 1998). The postwar economy from 1976 to 1980 failed to grow significantly – industrial production grew at a dismal rate of 0.6 percent a year and agricultural production only gained 1.9 percent (Murray, 1996). When Vietnam invaded Cambodia in 1978, it led to isolation from the international community. This international isolation directly led to additional economic hardships due to a lack of access to international and foreign trade. In response to the Cambodian invasion, China’s 1979 Vietnamese invasion worsened an already dire economic situation (Murray, 1996).

Vietnam tried to replace collective farming it had instituted following the American War with household farming which was marginally successful, but in the mid-1980s, the economy remained in ruins. With the unraveling of the Soviet Union, the Vietnamese realized that only through the excision of Marxist economics would it be able to sustain itself as a country (Cima, 1990). Vietnam, which has some of the most fertile fields for growing rice, was unable to feed itself and was spending large amounts of capital to *import* rice (Eisenstodt, 1996). Thus, the ten years after the American War became what the Vietnamese called “the bad years” since communist policies (i.e., collective farming) and the costly occupation of Cambodia resulted in Vietnam becoming one of the world’s poorest countries (Gibney, 1995). In order to make significant changes and to stop the downward trend, Vietnam began in 1986 a policy called Doi Moi which loosely translates to “new life” or “economic renovation.”<sup>1</sup>

### Doi Moi and The BTA

With the introduction of Doi Moi, the following changes were made to the economy of Vietnam:

- Decentralization of state economic management;
- Allowing inflation to be controlled by market forces;
- The liberalization of foreign investment laws;
- Granting more freedom to farmers to determine production inputs and outputs;
- The recognition that the private sector can be a source of economic growth (Than and Tan, 1993).

1. According to the Vietnamese Embassy of the United States, Doi Moi is the gradual globalization and reorganization that began in 1986 with the top priority given to economic reform in order to create a multi-sector market economy that would be regulated by the Vietnamese Government. See Embassy of Vietnam, “Economic Renovation: Doi Moi” (2011). Retrieved from <[http://www.vietnam.co.za/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=114:economic-renovation-doi-moi&catid=45:history-of-vietnam&Itemid=114](http://www.vietnam.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=114:economic-renovation-doi-moi&catid=45:history-of-vietnam&Itemid=114)>.

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While the above changes were not seriously implemented until 1989, Vietnam did begin to realize the best way to achieve economic growth was through a market-economy (Than and Tan, 1993). Perhaps the most significant change that Doi Moi ushered in was the ability to open its markets to foreign countries and the willingness to accept imports from former enemies, such as the U.S. In fact, a key result of Doi Moi was the U.S. lifting of its trade embargo on Vietnam. Today, Vietnam has established diplomatic relations with nearly 170 countries (including the United States), has trade relations with 195 countries, and has foreign investments from more than 70 countries and territories around the world (Than and Tan, 1993). Perhaps the major accomplishment of Doi Moi is that it led the way for the 2000 Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA) between Vietnam and the United States which was agreed upon in 2000. The trade agreement was a comprehensive one, covering four major areas, including goods, services, intellectual property and investment relations (McKinney, 2000). In the words of Dao Van Dau who was the Vice Minister of Trade in Vietnam:

“The negotiations on the VN-US trade agreement were carried out under the principles of equality, mutual benefits, respect of each other’s independence and sovereignty...[and is] a new step in Vietnam’s process of active integration into the regional and world economies” (McKinney, 2000, p. 23).

To put the success of the BTA in perspective, in 1990 there were no goods exported to Vietnam from the United States. In 2009, the U.S. exports to Vietnam totaled \$3 billion and by 2013 this figure had reached \$5 billion. In 1990, the U.S. received no imports from their former enemy. However, by 2009 there were more than \$12 million worth of imports the U.S. received from Vietnam; by 2013 this figure had reached 24 million (“Graphics: US – Vietnam Relations, 2010”; Office of the United States Trade Representation, 2014).

## Problems in U.S./Vietnam Relations

### *POW/MIA Controversy*

One aspect of the U.S./Vietnamese relationships that had been problematic for many years were the dual questions of whether or not Vietnam had released all of the American prisoners of war (POWS) and whether or not Vietnam had repatriated the remains of U.S. servicemen missing in action (MIA) from the war. One particularly troubling issue has been what is called “discrepancy” cases. These were incidents of U.S. servicemen who were seen alive after they were captured, but never made it home during Operation Homecoming in 1973 (*Report of the Senate Select Committee*, 1993; Kimsey and Fuller, 1993). While Vietnam continues to assert that all American POWs were returned in 1973, many – especially the League of Families – have never believed that the Vietnamese returned all American POWs (*Report of the Senate Select Committee*, 1993). By the end of military action in 1973, there were 2,583 MIAs from the war. To date 1,641 American servicemen are still missing in Vietnam. However, the United States through the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) has worked closely with the Vietnamese Government to try to repatriate as many remains as possible (Department of Defense, n.d.).<sup>2</sup> This can also be dangerous work. On April 7, 2001, sixteen military and civilian officials were killed on a JPAC mission: nine were Vietnamese and seven were Americans (“Team Members Honored,” The2011). In retrospect, while extremely troubling to the 1,641 families of American MIAs, it is important to note that over

2. As of January 15, 2015 the JPAC no longer exists, and has been replaced by the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA), and the DPAA has also merged with the Defense POW/Mission Personnel Office (DPMO), and the Life Sciences Equipment Laboratory (LSEL).

73,000 U.S. personnel are still MIA from World War II and more than 7,500 are still MIA from the Korean War (Defense Prisoner of War, 2015). Oddly enough, this issue was the sole source of communication between the two countries until relations were normalized in 1995. It will never be known how many years it would have taken for these two countries to normalize relationships if there had not been a POW/MIA issue to discuss, but it is rather ironic that such an issue paved way for the two former enemies to communicate with each other (Brown, 2010). While books and articles continue to be published claiming that not all POWs were released, this issue does not seem to be a major dividing point between the two countries as it was in the two decades following the end of the war.<sup>3</sup> In fact, Vietnam has worked cooperatively with the U.S. to reclaim the remains of U.S. servicemen who perished. Ron Ward, a JPAC Casualty Resolution Specialist, made the following remarks to the 45<sup>th</sup> Annual League of Families Meeting in June of 2014:

“One final success to note this year is that after many years of negotiating, the Vietnamese government has lifted the restrictions on all POW/MIA sites in Vietnam. That means that there are no known sites in Vietnam restricted to JPAC teams. This piece of cooperation will allow us to help ensure an accounting for the individuals associated with those sites, and we are moving quickly to complete operations at those previously restricted sites as soon as possible” (Ward, 2014, p. 7).

In addition to the cooperation of the Vietnamese government on this issue, politicians have also reached across the Pacific to each other – both President Clinton and President Bush visited Vietnam while in office, and Vietnamese Presidents Nguyen Minh Triet and Truong Tan Sang have visited the United States. However, other issues still trouble the relationship between these former enemies, most predominately Agent Orange.

### *Agent Orange*

Though it is hard to believe that forty years after the war ended, Agent Orange is still a painful issue in U.S. Vietnam relations. Between 1962 and 1971 the U.S. sprayed over 20 million gallons of the carcinogenic herbicide over southern Vietnam in an attempt to eliminate cover and food for Vietcong and North Vietnamese Army troops. This program was named Operation Ranch Hand, and it was devastating to the Vietnamese countryside. Agent Orange destroyed five million acres of forest as well as 500,000 acres of crops – an area about the size of Massachusetts (Aspen Institute, n.d.). Agent Orange contains highly toxic dioxin, which has been linked to cancers, diabetes, nerve, and heart disease in those directly or indirectly exposed to the herbicide. Dioxin can last many decades and does not easily degrade. Between four and five million Vietnamese were exposed to the herbicide during the war and the Vietnamese claim three million have serious health problems caused by the chemical (Stocking, 2010). In 1966, resolutions were introduced to the United Nations that claimed that the U.S. was violating the 1925 Geneva Protocol against the use of biological and chemical weapons, but the U.S. was successful at defeating most of the resolutions, and use of Agent Orange continued in Vietnam until 1971 (Schuck, 1986).

The Government of Vietnam claims at least four million of its citizens were exposed to the deadly herbicide out of which approximately three million have suffered illnesses as a direct result of the exposure. Consequently, the Government of Vietnam believes the U.S. bears some responsibility in helping those afflicted with Agent Orange diseases:

3. There are still many who believe that the U.S. abandoned Vietnam POWs who they believe were left behind after the war. For example, see Monika Jensen-Stevenson and William Stevenson, 1990, *Kiss the Boys Goodbye: How the United States Betrayed its Own POWs in Vietnam*. New York: Dutton; and Elizabeth A. Stewart, 2008, *An Enormous Crime: The Definitive Account of American POWs Abandoned in Southeast Asia*. New York: Thomas Dunne Books.

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"The Vietnamese exposed to the chemical suffer from cancer, liver damage, pulmonary and heart diseases, defects to reproductive capacity and skin and nervous disorders. Their children and grandchildren have severe physical deformities, mental and physical disabilities, diseases and shortened life spans. The forests and jungles in large parts of southern Vietnam were devastated and denuded. Centuries-old habitat was destroyed and will not regenerate with the same diversity for hundreds of years. Animals that inhabited the forests and jungles are threatened with extinction, disrupting the communities that depended on them. The rivers and underground water in some areas have also been contaminated. Erosion and desertification will change the environment, causing dislocation of crop and animal life" (Mincer and Cohen, 2012, para. 4).

The Vietnam Association for Victims of Agent Orange/Dioxin filed a suit in 2004 against the companies in the United States that produced Agent Orange (e.g., Dow and Monsanto) claiming that Agent Orange violated The Hague Convention on Land Warfare, the 1925 Geneva Protocol, and the 1949 Geneva Conventions (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2014). However the lawsuit was dismissed as the presiding judge concluded that Agent Orange was not a prohibited herbicide, and that the companies were not liable for the manner in which the military used their product (Martin, 2009). Yet there has been progress on this issue. The U.S. and Vietnam held a formal ceremony at the Da Nang airport in 2012 to commemorate the beginning of U.S. efforts to decontaminate areas affected by Agent Orange which is expected to take four years and cost the U.S. \$43 million (Fuller, 2012). However, one of the most comprehensive published reports on Agent Orange concluded that there is no definitive proof that Agent Orange is the cause of health problems in Vietnam (Young, 2009). Thus, the controversy of the legacy of Agent Orange in Vietnam continues.

### *The Human Rights Issue in Vietnam*

As scholar Frederick Brown (2010) states, "It is no secret that the U.S. and Vietnam hold strongly opposed views on human rights, religious freedom and philosophy of governance" (p. 328). One of the core beliefs of Americans is freedom of speech which is a fundamental right guaranteed by the First Amendment. However, little if any free speech is allowed in Vietnam.<sup>4</sup> The government controls all print media and makes it clear that any challenge to the Communist Party will be considered a violation of Vietnamese law for which offenders will receive harsh treatment (Brown, 2010). On April 8, 2006, a movement known as Bloc 8406 which consisted of pro-democracy advocates took to the Internet to make an appeal for freedom of political association and expression. The Vietnamese Government's response was harsh. According to the International Human Rights Watch organization, Block 8406 members were detained by the government and accused of breaking many Vietnamese laws, some of which had nothing to do with freedom of expression. As Phil Robertson, deputy Asia Director of Human Rights Watch commented in 2011, "Vietnam's donors and development partners need to forcefully express their public support for Vietnam's courageous activists and call for immediate release of all who have been arbitrarily detained" ("Vietnam: Free Political and Religious Detainees," 2011, para. 2). In April of 2011, Human Rights Watch has released a list of twenty-four Vietnamese detained by the government for their support of Block 8406 or other issues associated with free speech or religion, and many of them have not been officially charged. Many others were detained for crimes such as tax evasion, "fleeing abroad to carry out activities against the people's administration," distributing anti-government leaflets, "illegally transmitting information on the network of telecommunication." In fact, eight of the people detained were listed as "whereabouts unknown" ("Vietnam: Free Political and Religious Detainees," 2011).

4. Some "Overseas Vietnamese" known as Viet Kieu (Vietnamese living in the U.S.) joke about the lack of freedom of speech in their country by saying, "You have freedom of speech, and then you have no freedom."

More recently, Vietnam seems to have declared war on independent bloggers meting out harsh punishment for anyone who voices a dissenting opinion about the government. In September of 2013, blogger Ngo Hao received a fifteen-year jail sentence for writing and circulating false information about the government. His family is concerned because Hao is sixty-five and in frail health. Blogger Pham Viet Dao received a fifteen-month jail sentence in March of 2014 for "creating a bad image of the Communist Party and government" in 91 blog posts (Reporters Without Borders, 2014, March 19). Reporters Without Borders representative Benjamin Ismail stated that this conviction "shows the government is going all out in its persecution of news providers" (Reporters Without Borders, 2014, July 7). In May of 2014, bloggers Nguyen Huu Vinh and Nguyen Thi Thuy were arrested for posting blogs that contained "bad content and incorrect information that reduces the prestige and trust in state agencies... [and] for abuse of democratic freedoms (Reporters Without Borders, 2014, May, 6 para. 1-2). They currently are facing jail terms from two to seven years. Reporters Without Borders research chief Lucie Morillon reacted to these arrests by stating:

"The arrest of two more bloggers, just two days after World Press Freedom Day, is a clear signal by the authorities, and shows that Vietnam is going further down the road of repression" (Reporters Without Borders, 2014, May 6, para. 3).

Reporters Without Borders currently ranks Vietnam 174 out of 180 countries on its press freedom index and list Vietnam as "an enemy of the Internet" (Reporters Without Borders, 2014, May 6). On April 11, 2013, the U.S. House of Representatives held a hearing on Vietnamese Government's human rights violations, and the testimony that was presented was scathing in its criticism of the Vietnamese Government and Communist Party in Vietnam. As stated in these hearings:

"Since 2007, Vietnam has been backsliding on human rights and is now the proud possessor of the title 'The Worst Violator of Human Rights in Southeast Asia.' Political opposition is outlawed; repression of dissidents intensified; severe restrictions on freedom of expressions are imposed; bloggers and peaceful activists are arrested, imprisoned, and tortured" ("Highlighting Vietnamese Government," 2013, p. 10).

This same record also identified Vietnam as "...an egregious violator of a broad array of human rights" (p. 1), and claimed that Vietnam uses surveillance and censorship to suppress human, religious freedom, and the persecution of the Hmoung ("hill people") living in the Northwest Highlands in Vietnam. Overall, these hearings presented a dismal picture of human rights in Communist Vietnam. However, in May of 2014, the United States House of Representatives released a statement praising Vietnam's achievements in human rights, "Including freedom of expression, press, association and religion, as well as ensuring the rights of prisoners" (Embassy of the Socialist Republic, 2014). This is a rather bizarre statement in light of the previous mentioned violations in human at the aforementioned Congressional hearing in 2013. It is hard to believe that in one year Vietnam made so much progress on human rights. In fact, months after this proclamation from the U.S. House of Representatives, Vietnam began arresting bloggers who questioned the Vietnamese Government. Obviously, Vietnam has a long way to go to improve its record on human rights in spite of the proclamation by the U.S. House of Representatives.

### Reconciliation

While issues between the U.S. Government and the Vietnamese Government may never be completely resolved – Vietnam remains a communist country despite the economic reforms and the U.S. is a capitalist country – there is little doubt that the people of these countries have made tremendous progress to move on from the distant war. However, true reconciliation between Vietnam

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and the U.S. will only occur when the Vietnamese perceive that the Americans want to be a friend to Vietnam, not just a strategically against China. As Vietnamese official Hoang Anh Tuan stated:

“The history of Vietnam-US ties shows that it will be bumpy if one of the parties takes advantage of the relationship to serve its own interests or to participate in a wider geopolitical game, as was the case of the US intervention in the Second Indochina War... bilateral relations can only be placed on a stable and sustainable footing if they are configured to serve the national interests of both Vietnam and United States rather than the geopolitical interests of only one of the parties” (Tuan, 2010, p. 348).

However, Americans who visit Vietnam are amazed at the friendliness towards Americans. They are also surprised to see the U.S. flag on jackets, hats, t-shirts, etc. When asked about this issue, Vietnamese consider the war against the Americans as a mere “blip” of their historical timeline. Though China supported Vietnam during the American War, it historically has been their main adversary for more than 2,000 years. The Vietnamese always conceptualized the U.S. Government as the enemy, not the people of the U.S. The U.S. fought with Ho Chi Minh against Japan in World War II when the Office of Strategic Services (the OSS was the forerunner of the current CIA) set up American-Vietnamese guerrillas in Vietnam. An American doctor, Paul Hoagland, saved Ho Chi Minh’s life when he was stricken with Malaria (Drury and Calvin, 2011). In fact, after the U.S. helped the Vietnamese defeat Japan during World War II, Ho Chi Minh wrote a letter to President Truman asking for the U.S. help in achieving their independence from France. The French had reclaimed their colonization of Vietnam after the war (which they would lose nine years later at Dien Bien Phu), but Truman never saw Ho Chi Minh’s letter (Tuan, 2010). It was intercepted by Allen Dulles of the OSS (It will never be known how Truman would have reacted, but it most likely would have been an unpopular decision to help Vietnam while at the same time seeking support from the French to stop the spread of communism in Europe).

Perhaps the true reconciliation of the Vietnam War does not transcend beyond the borders of Vietnam. Bitterness exists regarding the “re-education camps” and the cruel and harsh treatment of those who were sent to the camps. After the fall of Saigon in 1975, the communists sent over one million people to 150 re-education camps (one in three South Vietnamese families had a relative in one of these camps) to “learn about the ways of the new government” and serve as punishment for supporting or fighting with the Americans (Truong, 2014). They were told they would not be gone for longer than a week or more, but many were imprisoned for over 17 years without any formal trials or charges against them. Life in the camps was miserable, and an estimated 160,000-250,000 perished in these camps, though no official record exists of the accurate number. In fact, the inmates of these camps were treated as slave labor, and were beaten and starved into submission (Do, Phan, and Garcia, 2014). One major source of bitterness is that those who died in the camps were buried where they died. In Vietnamese culture many believe that a soul wanders aimlessly until they receive a proper burial from their family (Mason, 2011). Thanh Dac Nguyen, a former officer in the South Vietnamese Army and a survivor of a re-education camp, founded “The Returning Casualty,” a Houston-based organization whose mission is to find those buried when they died in the camps and return their remains to their families. So far they have only been able to return the remains to 90 families (Mason, 2011). The bitterness between the Vietnamese who fought for the Saigon Government and those who fought for the leaders in Hanoi still exists. As former vice president of Vietnam Nguyen Thi Binh stated:

“We should put into practice and apply seriously the policy of national concord. It is also an ethical rule of the Vietnamese people. If vis-à-vis the U.S., a former enemy who has caused so many pains and sorrows to our people, we could implement the policy of ‘Leaving aside the past to the future,’ then there is no reason why people of the same country cannot reconcile each with other, love each other, join together in order to construct our own homeland... In my opinion, we should act and more to heal the wounds of war” (Quang, 2013, p. 417).

Vietnamese scholar Tran Huu Quang (2013) believes Vietnam is now a land of peace, not a land of war, and it “should be a state of all the people, of all the nation, standing above partial and parochial interests” (p. 423). In order for Vietnam to move on, Quang believes several things must happen in Vietnam: (1) conditions must be created for opposing parties to meet, (2) there must be freedom of the press to allow for expression of opinion on different political views, (3) the elimination of insular, parochial, and discriminatory mind-sets, and (4) the reduction of old wounds from the American War by reducing symbols of the 1975 victory. It is quite doubtful that the achievement of these idealistic conditions will occur in the near future, or perhaps even at all. Opposition to the government is not allowed, and it is doubtful freedom of the press will ever flourish in Vietnam. Most of all, the defeat of the United States is a major source of Vietnamese pride: statues, monuments, museums, and other reminders of this victory are ubiquitous across the country.

Despite the physical reminders of America’s defeat in the Vietnam War, the United States and the Socialistic Republic of Vietnam continue to improve their relationship. While there is not a military alliance between the two countries, Vietnam and the United States have jointly committed to put the past behind and look towards the future. The pivotal decision Vietnam has to make moving forward is how close it can become with the U.S. without offending China. Vietnam and China continue to dispute islands in the South China Sea. China recently exacerbated this dispute by moving a massive state-owned oil platform into an area in the South China Sea that was well within Vietnam’s economic zone. This resulted in many violent protests in Vietnam and the death of 16 Chinese nationals in Vietnam (Hodal and Kaiman, 2014). China had to send a small armada for the purpose of evacuating any Chinese nationals who wanted to leave Vietnam. Additionally, several factories north of Ho Chi Minh City that were identified as Chinese owned were destroyed (Stout, 2014). The evolution of U.S./Vietnam relations now include a Memorandum of Understanding that identifies five priority areas for defense cooperation: (1) regular contact between the U.S. Defense Department and Vietnam’s Ministry of National Defense, (2) maritime security, (3) search and rescue, (4) humanitarian assistance, and (5) disaster relief and peacekeeping (Thayer, 2013). In the final analysis, and type of military alliance between Vietnam and the United States will be a tricky one, as Vietnam continues to walk a tight rope between the two superpowers. For now, the Vietnamese Government has decided not to offend China, and not to completely embrace its former enemy with a military alliance (Perlez, 2014; Nguyen, 2015).

## Conclusion

Almost forty years after the end of a war that divided two countries, Vietnamese-American relations have proved that enemies can turn their acrimony into a mutually beneficial relationship. Once Vietnam instigated its Doi Moi policy, Vietnam began to return to the world economic stage. Nine years after the institution of this policy, the United States and Vietnam normalized relations with each other, and in 2000 the two nations signed the Bilateral Trade Agreement. However, there are still a multitude of issues that concern people from both countries which the passage of time will or will not resolve. Were there any POW/MIAs that were left behind after Operation Homecoming in 1973? To date no credible arguments exist of such a possibility, though many in the U.S. still believe that men were left behind at the end of the war. Will Vietnam ever allow people to openly criticize its government? At this time, the answer seems to be an emphatic “No” as the Vietnamese Government continues to arrest and detain anyone that openly criticizes its leaders. Will the U.S. ever make an attempt to help individuals who suffer from illness resulting from Agent Orange exposure? Unfortunately, this appears to be an intractable issue for which no agreeable resolution may be found. Though Vietnamese citizens have tried to sue the manufacturers of the deadly herbicide in U.S. courts, their attempts have failed. Is the reconciliation between Vietnam and the U.S. based on a real friendship or merely a strategic alliance to thwart China? Notwithstanding the

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answer to the previous question, the most elusive reconciliation over the Vietnam War to cement lies *within* the borders of Vietnam between all its own citizens. Until this cathartic reconciliation is achieved, the American War will forever haunt the Vietnamese.

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