
Assessing State and Societal Functions of the Military and the War Experience in *Doi Moi* Vietnam

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Abstract

Studies on the military in Vietnam today see a concurrence between the changing role of the army—its growing economic role as well as its role as a tool to control the Vietnamese population—and the changing economy and international environment. How do we make sense of this evolution and its impact on civil–military relations in terms of power relations and authority? This study seeks to provide an analytical framework that shows how the military is not a homogeneous entity but rather is made up of various groups that derive uneven benefits from the post–cold war situation. The author’s contribution is primarily at the conceptual level, stressing the dynamics of power relations among the military, society, and state from a Weberian perspective. *Doi moi*, as an era of economic and social change, has redefined power relations. The author also emphasizes the generational and historical elements in civil–military relations that are specific to Vietnam.

Keywords

army, Weber, generations, demilitarization, business

Historically, the rise of the postcolonial Vietnamese state has been inseparable from the rise of the military. The modern Vietnamese state was established by the army, which won successive foreign and civil wars. Vietnam fought the first Indochina War from 1946 to 1954 against the French imperial nation. War resumed from 1959 to 1975; known as the Vietnam War, this ended with the victory of North Vietnam

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against the U.S.-supported Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam). What ensued was the reunification of Vietnam under the communist regime of the North.

During the past two decades, however, Vietnam has moved from a period of continuous warfare to one in which war seems a distant prospect. The end of the cold war in Vietnam corresponded with the implementation of *doi moi* (renovation), which refers to the transition from a centrally planned command economy to a “market economy with a socialist direction.” *Doi moi* has redefined the functions of the military in a changing socioeconomic landscape. Indeed, the collapse of the Soviet Union greatly reduced funding for the Vietnamese military, which in turn brought about the pressing problems of financing the army and the prospect of increased military involvement in private business. The end of competition and fighting between the Soviet Union and the United States heralded the hope of a more peaceful world and contributed to the drive to reduce the size of Vietnam’s fighting forces.

Since *doi moi*, demobilization and the partial demilitarization of society have represented key aspects of the Vietnamese military experience. Spurred by Vietnam’s economic difficulties, as well as changes in the international political environment, the government began a demobilization program in 1987; this resulted in the early retirement of a large proportion of military personnel. It is estimated that from 1987 to 1990 a full 600,000 military personnel, including 100,000 officers, were demobilized.¹ However, demobilization did not necessarily mean demilitarization since many of those affected were redeployed in reserves and local forces. Others were placed in army-run enterprises or national defense companies.²

A number of studies on the armed forces in Vietnam today focus on the relation between the issue of financing the armed forces in Vietnam with the end of Soviet aid and the army’s involvement in business activities since *doi moi* as well as the subsequent impact of these developments on domestic policies and institutions. The central issue that they address is the changing role of the military in relation to the state and the party since 1945.³ These works see a concurrence between the changing role of the army—its growing economic role as well as its role as a tool to control the Vietnamese population—and the changing economy and international environment.

How do we make sense of such an evolution and its impact on civil–military relations in terms of power relations and authority? While my area of interest relates to Thayer’s and Vasavakul’s findings, this study seeks to provide a different analytical framework to show how the military is not a homogeneous entity but rather made up of various groups that derive uneven benefits from the post–cold war situation. My contribution is primarily at the conceptual level, stressing the dynamics of power relations among the military, society, and state from a Weberian perspective. *Doi moi*, as embodying a historical era of economic and social change, has redefined power relations. Indeed, if we interpret this power as a zero-sum game, this means that *doi moi* has resulted in certain groups within the armed forces and society losing power, which other groups have gained.

The second aspect of my contribution is to emphasize the generational as well as historical elements in civil–military relations that are specific to the Vietnamese case.

Hence, the scope of this analysis extends to first encompass the North–South variations of civil–military interactions. Chronologically these are grounded in the nation’s experiences of war and civil war, the North Vietnamese challenge to unify the country under communist rule, and finally its treatment of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam personnel who supported a noncommunist South Vietnam. I also examine generational differences in attitude toward the armed forces between those who came of age during the Vietnam War and those who did so afterward.⁴

Theoretical Context

Vietnam is not the only country whose state authorities have faced civil–military issues during a period of a transition. Indeed, many other countries (e.g., in Eastern Europe) have reduced their armed forces because of the end of the cold war, hence the current interest in debating the future of armies in relation to the state and society in different parts of the world.

Accordingly, this piece is grounded in two subsets of the literature on civil–military relations in transitional societies. The first is literature on societies that are undergoing change to a postcommunist, democratic state, which I call the “post-Soviet democratizing regimes” cluster. The second subset is literature analyzing nations that have embraced economic liberalization while still maintaining a Marxist–Leninist political system (China, Cuba, and Vietnam), which I term the “communist civil/party–military regimes” cluster.

Certain issues are common to both clusters, such as the post–cold war effect on the armed forces. For instance, the armed forces of all these countries have had to devise appropriate strategies of readjustment in an environment where economic reforms have become a foremost preoccupation while traditional security and defense problems have taken on secondary importance. At a logistical level, these armies have been facing financial difficulties and the downsizing of their numbers, mostly as a result of the end of a bipolar world. Several states now require their military to bear the cost of its own operation, with the result that Ukraine has begun to promote “military tourism,” while in China the armed forces have become involved in various branches of the civilian economy.⁵ In addition, the military has been used as a means to control the population and as a tool to exercise political power, as in Russia under Putin, Slovakia under Mečiar, and China (Tiananmen Square). Many of these countries are struggling to create appropriate boundaries between the military and nonmilitary domains, and a complex interplay of different authorities is at work.

However, there are other issues that are distinctive to one cluster or the other. The literature on the post-Soviet democratizing regimes cluster is primarily concerned with how successful these countries have been in establishing civil control over the national military and paramilitary organizations. The democratization of society requires democratic measures of control over the armed forces, which must replace the control measures of the Communist Party.⁶ Such an evolution requires a democratic civilian management of the armed forces, that is, democratic governance over

institutions; a military under the control of the whole government structure and accountable to the legislature; and a military willing to accept its subordination to civilian authorities and function according to democratic procedures.⁷

Similarly, the literature on the communist civil/party–military regimes cluster addresses issues such as how societies in China, Cuba, and Vietnam are dealing with the challenge of maintaining a Marxist–Leninist state in the face of an expanding capitalist economy. For instance, comparing China and Cuba, Mora and Wiktorowicz argue that these countries are embracing economic reform as part of “survival strategies” to boost military loyalty and political support.⁸ More generally, China, Cuba, and Vietnam all have militaries that are powerful institutions with strong interconnections to their respective Communist Parties.⁹ Indeed, the three are similar in sharing a revolutionary experience and a Marxist–Leninist model of party–civil relations. In addition, these nations have armed forces that were previously engaged in patterns of economic and social activities before economic liberalization and are now increasingly involved in the civilian economy.¹⁰

These commonalities make these three nations comparable units with which scholars can formulate theories regarding civil–military relations in Communist societies. For instance, Mora compares China, Vietnam, and Cuba in their military support for political change. While offering a useful conceptual model to compare post–cold war civil–military ties in Communist regimes, he does not take into account group diversity within each military but rather treats this institution as a homogeneous entity.¹¹

In contrast, an alternative framework offers a more nuanced approach to the study of the military. This framework is inspired by a Weberian way of thinking about the relationship among opportunity, contingency, and action regarding state, military, and society relationships. This article argues that the conditions under which the military is operating are more diffuse and that such fluidity can be better grasped by using the analytical terms *power relations* and *authority*, which allow an examination of various groups and experiences. These Weberian terms aim at examining how different groups have had to renegotiate their access to different forms of power—economic power, prestige, political power—and how this has affected civil–military relations since the end of the cold war.

Eco Power

Historical Legacy

The Vietnam People’s Army (VPA) was created in December 1944 as the People’s Liberation Armed Force and evolved into a quasi-conventional type of armed forces in the following decades. After the 1945 August Revolution, the VPA remained a key factor in strengthening the power of Ho Chi Minh’s Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), proclaimed in Hanoi on September 2, 1945. From a modest beginning in the mid-1940s, the army had grown into one of the largest in the world by the mid-1980s—at the time ranking fifth behind the armies of the Soviet Union, China,

the United States, and India. In addition, it had 2.5 million reservists, a Border Defense Force of 60,000, and diverse paramilitary groups amounting to 1.5 million. By the end of the 1980s, a full 8 percent of the Vietnamese population was directly or indirectly affiliated with the military, which composed 1.26 million members.¹²

Because of a limited budget, during the first years after the revolution, the government of the DRV urged the armed forces to embrace a policy of self-sufficiency. One measure was aimed at fostering reciprocal economic ties between the army and the population at the regional level. Self-sufficiency committees were established and led by economic cadres, whose role was to clarify government policy, plan production, and allocate agricultural land to the regional forces by negotiating with the local population. Under the supervision of the army, peasants were assigned to clear the land, maintain irrigation systems, and raise livestock. Party literature stressed the need for the military to not only protect the nation but also participate in the rice harvest in locations close to battlefields.¹³

Historically, Lockhart asserts, military organization in precolonial Vietnam was a response to the need to repay society for bearing the economic cost of a standing army. For instance, military personnel engaged in fixing dikes, digging canals, harvesting, and growing their own food. At the same time, soldiers could be summoned straight out of the fields to quell revolts. Hence, the old Vietnamese expression, "To be a soldier is to be a peasant" (*ngu binh u nong*), which reflects the military strategy based on the cultivation of land by soldiers in the provinces.¹⁴

The historical interchangeability between the categories of soldier and peasant paved the way for the VPA's participation in the economy before the rise of *doi moi*. Before the 1945 August Revolution VPA units were already producing weapons, and the defense industry continued to expand after the end of the Franco-Vietnam War in 1954. By 1958, calls to link economic development with defense were officially pronounced in the Fourteenth Plenum of the Central Committee. During the Vietnam War, the VPA corps grew their own vegetables and raised livestock next to their camps. When the war ended in 1975, army forces were deployed in various economic activities, including agriculture, construction, and the opening of new economic zones.¹⁵ In brief, the economic role of the Vietnamese army was rooted in the early revolutionary period and was born out of a struggle for survival. It reflected a long-term approach to military organization based on the idea that every peasant was a potential soldier. The expansion of the military's productive functions in the economy since *doi moi* therefore has not arisen out of a vacuum but has been built on preexisting traditions and structures.

Involvement in the Market Economy and Projects of Economic Development

The demobilization and redeployment of the army since *doi moi* are a result of the changing international system as well as Vietnam's poor economic performance. The collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe led to the end of

Soviet aid to Vietnam. Vietnam suddenly found itself without a major external benefactor that could assist in maintaining and modernizing its military forces. In addition, Vietnam lacked hard currency while Russia insisted that wartime loans be repaid; the outstanding debts were estimated at 10 billion to 11 billion rubles. Russia discontinued its policy of giving free military assistance and insisted on "cash (in kind) and carry." Throughout the 1980s, the Soviet Union contributed roughly the equivalent of US\$1.5 million per year in military assistance to Vietnam. In 1985 alone, Soviet military assistance was about half of Vietnam's total national defense expenditure, but during the 1980s the value of Vietnamese trade with the Soviet Union decreased by more than 60 percent. The economy was therefore too weak for the state to supply the required materials and funds for the armed forces.¹⁶

The government was finding it a challenge not only to provide basic needs for the military but also to bear the military expenses because of foreign policies. In 1987 Vietnam was forced to withdraw its troops from Cambodia and Laos, partially because of the high cost of occupation in Cambodia and stationing of troops in Laos. Furthermore, the supposedly "Vietnamese friends" were more or less welcome in these two countries. As Thayer and Amer observe, leaders realized that they could not implement *doi moi* without first settling the Cambodian conflict. Vietnam's withdrawal from Cambodia eliminated the former's global status as a "pariah state," under which other countries had carried out an aid-and-trade boycott against Vietnam.¹⁷

The demobilization and redeployment of the army were also very much linked to Vietnam's poor economic performance. Vietnam experienced chronic economic crises during the mid-1980s because of the shortcomings of the socialist model. As Thayer and Hervouet point out, this meant that in 1989 the Ministry of Finance could raise funds to cover only two-thirds of the military budget, which led to a deterioration in the living standards of staff and created problems in maintaining and storing military equipment and weapons. This situation made it difficult for the military to attract candidates to its officer training schools.¹⁸

In response to these circumstances, the government passed important economic reforms that allowed the conversion of VPA economic building units into corporations that were subject to the same state laws as civilian enterprises. Such developments allowed the VPA to form joint ventures with private Vietnamese or foreign businesses. In 1995, the economic activities of the army were categorized into defense industry, defense-related industry, and exclusively commercial enterprises.¹⁹ By 1993, 12 percent of the standing army—seventy thousand soldiers—was working full-time in diverse commercial businesses. In 1995 the army's commercial activities netted US\$360 million, one example of which was the Truong Son General Corporation. In the 1990s this company had a staff of seven thousand people, four-fifths of whom were military personnel, in nineteen enterprises.²⁰ Another case is that of Military Depot K882 (Department of Military Materials under the General Department of Technology), as outlined in the following description:

It has focused on stepping up agricultural production through improving poor soil and building VACR models.²¹ In recent years, the unit has expanded its husbandry

area to more than 1,000m² and ensured the norm of 12kg of vegetables per capita per month. Fishponds, with a total area of 3.5ha, turn out around 2 tons of fish annually. Moreover, Military Depot K882 has raised about 250 livestock, including cows and goats. It also does forestation and plants industrial crops. It is estimated the unit earns an income of 400 million [dong] per year.²²

More and more successful army-run enterprises experienced an increase of 30 percent in revenue in 1996. In 1999 it was estimated that 100,000 military personnel—that is, about one-fifth to one-fourth of the standing army—were working in army-run enterprises.²³ Grinter argues that as much as 40 percent of the Vietnamese armed forces budget comes from commercial enterprises managed by officers and senior NCOs.²⁴

The military has not only helped usher in new ways of doing business along capitalist lines but also been deployed as an economic labor force in remote areas. As part of this economic development scheme in the 1990s, the armed forces were assigned to participate in poverty eradication programs. For instance, the army newspaper *Quan Doi Nhan Dan* tells the story of how in 2006 soldiers at the Ban Lau border in Lao Cai province (near the Chinese border) cooperated with the local population to lift them out of poverty. Their work included upgrading roads and providing machinery to plant trees and other high-economic-value industrial crops.²⁵ Cases of corruption regarding civil cadres misappropriating funds allotted for the economic development of the region probably led the regime to place more trust in the army than in civilian personnel for carrying out such tasks. Indeed, other examples of local government corruption led to mass demonstrations, such as five thousand members of ethnic minorities protesting in February 2001 in the Central Highlands.²⁶

Because of the changing international environment, the Vietnamese government has been teaming up with international organizations as a means of establishing economic ties and building new trade relations. For instance, in late 2006 Vietnam concluded an eleven-year negotiation process to become a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO). The newspaper *Quan Doi Nhan Dan* noted how such an agreement would help Vietnam “escape underdeveloped nation status” by allowing it to be an equal partner with other WTO members; this would help the country expand its export markets.²⁷ Earlier, in October 2006, this newspaper was already underlining how Vietnam’s international economic integration would bring further opportunities for it to expand its activities:

At present there are within the army more than 100 enterprises and 20 foreign-invested companies operating in various sectors of the national economy. Many of their products, such as industrial trinitrotoluene, construction materials, textiles, ships, seaport services, telecommunications, and ores have so far built up brand names in the market and played a significant role in the national economy. Many military businessmen have increased relations with foreign partners, gaining contracts to export their products. For instance, the Service Flight Corporation of Vietnam has carried out flights abroad for many years and Viettel has also increased its investment to expand telecom services abroad. Despite limited capital and technology, many enterprises of the General Department of Defense Industry have manufactured products for national

defense and turned out quality products for domestic consumption and export. Company 76 and Company of Mechanics 17 have alone earned millions of US dollars from exports.²⁸

However, military businessmen have found themselves facing problems similar to those of their civilian counterparts—a lack of equipment and technology as well as management skills among their senior officers. These deficiencies make it difficult for the Vietnamese to compete internationally.

In addition, Vietnamese generals have knowledge of the high level of corruption within the Indonesian, Thai, and Chinese armed forces. But Vietnamese commanders, some of whom personally profit from the business enterprises, appear satisfied and not worried—at least in public—about a loss of professionalism for these “business soldiers.”²⁹ Access to privilege, thanks to corruption, is lucrative—mainly in the higher ranks. There is a propensity for army-run enterprises to spend their profits on luxury items, such as buying new automobiles and renovating guesthouses, rather than reinvesting in capital stock.³⁰ However, it is unlikely that people would join the army for the sole purpose of participating in corruption. Indeed, there are two deterrents to joining the armed forces as a means of getting rich: first, it is very high risk since if people do not have political and social power they may end up suffering hardships with no monetary gain; second, it generally takes a long time to get to a position or to get connected to the proper network out of which it is possible to make a lucrative profit. Hence, power based on substantial material gratification is not a viable option for the rank and file in the military.

During the Seventh National Party Congress in 1991, the Communist Party proclaimed that Vietnam’s plan of industrialization and modernization was tied to the modernization of the army as well as the growth of a national defense industry.³¹ After 1994, the VPA was invested with the task of developing a national defense industry and generating a dual-use technology. The VPA hence became heavily involved in electronics, computing, and telecommunications. This, in turn, gave the VPA a greater impact on policy making. As a means to better regulate the VPA’s commercial activities and in turn control the growing economic power of this institution, the party created an independent economics department within the Defense Ministry. However, unlike as in China, the armed forces did not have to curtail their economic role in society.³²

The military scope of the mission in Vietnam is not only to participate in the economic development and modernization of the country and the defense industry but also to defend the nation from international and local threats that could accompany such international economic integration known as “peaceful evolution,” that is, the secret plan of foreign enemies to weaken Vietnamese socialism. On this note, Senior Lieutenant General Nguyen Van Rinh, deputy minister of defense and chairman of the Committee for International Economic Integration, added,

International economic integration is an inevitable trend for national economic development. The army in general, and military businessmen in particular, will actively participate in the process based on the principles of protecting the country’s sovereignty, national defense, national security, and national interests.³³

Contingency (the need for the army to finance itself and help the national economy) and opportunity (globalization and joint ventures) have helped the armed forces increase their economic and political power as an institution.

Remittance and Foreign Investments

From the late 1970s onward, it has been a state policy to export labor as a means to repay debt and deal with unemployment. Contract workers were dispatched in Europe and the Middle East. Labor was sent out for cooperative programs in communist countries of Europe. For instance, between 1987 and 1989 the Ministry of National Defense forwarded more than 25,000 demobilized army and defense industry workers to the Soviet Union, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria through labor cooperation programs. By 1989 it was estimated that of the 150,000 Vietnamese employed abroad, as many as 40 percent were ex-soldiers, mostly located in socialist nations.³⁴ Some of them engaged in unofficial trade between socialist countries. For instance, Vietnamese workers bought goods from the factories in which they worked while selling Vietnamese products to the locals. Such activities allowed a rapid improvement in the living standards of families whose relatives were working abroad.³⁵ While these activities started to decline by the 1990s, they offered an informal training on the mechanisms of the capitalist market. Hardy mentions, for instance, the case of Thang, who, ten years after his return, is now the director of a few businesses in Hanoi. This form of economic socialization and its economic benefits were well sought after by Vietnamese. Members of families with a war hero or disabled ex-serviceman were given priority in overseas job opportunities. In addition, children whose parents had substantial social and political powers were able to work overseas as a means to avoid participating in the war in Cambodia.³⁶ Hence, certain subgroups in the armed forces and society benefited from this opportunity to increase their economic power. Specific historical conditions as well as the current international environment created different life chances, that is, opportunities to improve the quality of life, for certain groups to the detriment of others.

In addition, despite the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, many Vietnamese citizens settled in the countries where they had gone to work. Today, there are 225,000 Vietnamese living in East Germany, the former Soviet Union, Bulgaria, and the Czech Republic. This is mainly the result of the exportation of about 300,000 Vietnamese workers in the 1980s to these countries. In 1987, Vietnam received 100 billion dong—US\$12 million at 1987 currency conversion rates—in remittances home from these migrants.³⁷ More recently, the 2005 volume of overseas remittances was calculated to reach US\$3 billion, or US\$300 million over the past years. The volume is probably higher since large sums are transferred through venues other than banks.³⁸ Through this informal channel, ex-members of the military have been contributing to the economic well-being of individuals and families back in Vietnam as well as the national economy.

Vietnam's Foreign Direct Investments

While the party had—and still has—very little, if any, control over family remittances, another source of capital that creates a severe challenge for the leadership is foreign direct investments (FDIs), over which it has only indirect control. According to a survey conducted by the Asian Business Council, Vietnam comes in at third position for investment attractiveness among Asian nations for 2007 to 2009, after China and India.³⁹ Vietnam, called an “FDI magnet,” registered almost US\$46.5 billion in FDI projects between 1998 and July 2008, creating 1.38 million jobs in direct employment and millions of positions in indirect employment.⁴⁰ One problem is that this money has been invested in tourism and real estate rather than other sectors more favorable to Vietnam's economic development. While investments in industry have increased, from January to August 2008, 18.37 percent of FDI was still in apartment development and 18.94 percent was in hotels and tourism.⁴¹ Exports are dominated by FDI enterprises: in the 1998 enterprise survey, 79 percent of foreign-invested firms and 50 percent of joint ventures reported exports, whereas among state enterprises (SEs)—some of them run by the armed forces—there were only approximately 33 percent that reported exports. This shows that the state and the military are not strongly dominating the economy despite the stated goal of the Vietnamese leadership in the early 1990s to rely on the SEs as the guiding force in economic development. Beresford argues that the Vietnamese state has not provided vital investment support to SEs, which has resulted in foreign investors and the domestic nonstate sector starting to dominate the economy.⁴² Although the legitimacy of the Vietnamese Communist Party, and indirectly the military, has been based on the charisma of the revolutionary leader Ho Chi Minh as well as the moral authority accumulated from thirty years of fighting against French colonialism and American intervention, more and more its legitimacy is based on economic performance.⁴³

Prestige

Historical Legacy: The Chiến Sĩ (Combatant) Ideology

In his study of the Vietnamese army, Douglas Pike emphasizes that from the armed struggle of the 1930s for colonial independence to the 1970s, the communists promoted a warfare technique based on blurring the boundary between combatants and noncombatants.⁴⁴ More precisely, Ho Chi Minh promoted the notion of a “nation at arms,” where each citizen was a soldier called to defend his or her homeland. At the same time, the doctrines of people's war and the united front deemphasized the difference between military and civilian leadership and served to sanction the army's political, economic, and security roles.⁴⁵ Such an approach reinforced ties among the Vietnamese people and downplayed the differences between civilians and the military.

Many years of protracted war against the French and the Americans (1946–75) created a warrior society, where the military had a central place in Vietnamese culture

and society by mobilizing the whole of society in these conflicts. As a result of their long nationalist struggle against French and American colonialists, the army and the Communist Party gained legitimacy among the masses.

A nation at arms fostered the image of the soldier, a mythical personage that many could identify with, who was able to defeat the French and Americans and to challenge China.⁴⁶ Up to today, the ideology and image of the *chiến sĩ* (combatant) remains an important tool the state utilizes to legitimate its power in the eyes of the population and to justify the redeployment of the military in certain areas of civilian life.

Thus, the unique historical situation of Vietnam has shaped interrelations among the military, the state, and society in specific ways and still molds the state's reactions to current and distinctive challenges that the country is facing. Turley argues that the party-state continues to rely on the technique of mass mobilization to gain support for the implementation of *doi moi*. The political agenda of the leaders has been to seek the active participation of the masses in carrying out the party's decisions as a means to maintain mass support. However, with the reduction in external threat—as has been the case after 1975—it has been more difficult to mobilize the population. Even so, a weak civil society and a reduced but still significant degree of political legitimacy allow party leaders to promote participation without fearing too much that such involvement might challenge the VCP's own rule in the long run.⁴⁷

Cultural Changes: Role of Globalization

In the postwar context, the militaristic ideology of *chiến sĩ* has become less relevant as capitalism is gaining a stronger foothold. Under *doi moi*, the party's call for people to enrich themselves has led to the emergence of new symbols of prestige—housing, motor-bikes, color television sets, mobile phones—connected to consumption and a Western lifestyle. Thomas and Drummond underline how the growth of international investments in the early 1990s resulted in the increased availability of imported consumer products through the opening of new shopping centers in the cities.⁴⁸ Only a minority can afford to consume such items, and the new marker of success, and hence prestige, is the capacity to purchase such products. While prestige derives from one's social status and occupation, globalization has altered the definition and distribution of prestige and power in society and thus the access to privileges. First, prior to the *doi moi* era, success and prestige were “nationalized” and communal notions; hence, personal accomplishments were not seen as a success if they did not contribute to socialism. Since *doi moi*, these notions have been “privatized.”⁴⁹ Second, well-paid professions, rather than military services as a *chiến sĩ* to the nation, are the means of gaining access to good education, good medical care, and Western goods. Indeed, Vietnamese now have to pay for schooling and medical care.⁵⁰ For instance, since 1989 the government has implemented tuition fees at every level of the educational system. The Vietnamese state's withdrawal from its commitment to the principles of universalism for education and health policy appeared later, through the new constitution of 1992, which does not secure access to health care and education for all.⁵¹

Offspring of war invalids and war dead (on the DRV side of the conflict) do obtain dispensations, but the number of people entitled to dispensations decreases each year.⁵² Centrally funded programs of the Ministry of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs help disabled war veterans, resistance fighters, and others who participated in the war effort and provide assistance to the families of fallen soldiers. Only those who supported the winning side are entitled to assistance.⁵³ But not everyone has been rewarded for defending the motherland against the Americans. For instance, veterans of the youth corps are not entitled to military pension unless they suffered injury, and the state pays for it under the disability payment. According to Karen Gottschang Turner and Phan Thanh Hao, a veteran with “light” injuries received only 150,000 dong (about US\$12) per month in 1997, while a veteran who was totally disabled received 400,000 dong.⁵⁴

In addition, the image of the *chiến sĩ* does not confer the same amount of prestige to different categories of veterans. For instance, veterans of the Vietnam War are conferred more prestige—because of their role in liberating the nation from foreign aggression—than are veterans who participated in the war with Cambodia or later in the short war with China (1979). However, even the level of prestige for participation in the Vietnam War is not significant because more than half of the population was in one way or another involved in this conflict.

In addition, circumstantial opportunities in a society at peace—relationships among opportunity, contingency, and action—have declined since the military is less present in everyday life. One informant told me how her mother still bitterly envies the soldiers who were able to take over the property of people who fled the country in 1975.⁵⁵ Following the “liberation” of the South, almost 400,000 Southerners were sent to “reeducation camps,” and between 1975 and 1989 more than one million Southern Vietnamese left the country. In addition, some two million Southerners had to resettle into rural “economic zones.”⁵⁶ Homes evacuated by South Vietnamese citizens were occupied by Vietnamese soldiers on the winning side of the conflict. The possibility of such economic gains on the part of soldiers belonging to victorious armies no longer exists; thus, the advantages of being a soldier have been reduced.

Furthermore, Taylor argues that since *doi moi*, official narratives in the South have glorified the modernizing impact of capitalism in the delta region during the war against the United States. Such a global vision is replacing the past Vietnamese state’s discourse on the South portrayed as a consumer community contaminated by “neo-colonial poisons.”⁵⁷ The lower-ranking soldiers’ social honor associated with their participation in the victory of the North over the South in 1975 has therefore been dismissed, and we may wonder if some of them feel bewildered at the result of their revolutionary work.

Hence, the prestige of the military is ambiguous. On one hand, the armed forces are respected for their past victories. For instance, 75 percent of the population in the age bracket fifteen to twenty-nine years had “a great deal of confidence” in the armed forces, while 21 percent of this age group had “quite a lot of confidence” in this institution, according to the 2005–6 World Values Survey.⁵⁸ On the other hand, young

Vietnamese happen to have little interest in the prospect of a military career, which often offers a meager salary and a low social status to its rank and file and young officers. For instance, twenty-eight-year-old Mr. Phong, an army officer, says he would have preferred to study at university, which would have allowed him to choose another career. However, because of financial constraints he joined the armed forces. Mr. Nguyen, from Vinh Phuc province, also became an officer because of the same reasons: "My family would not be burdened by the costs of my studies."⁵⁹ Indeed, the government pays basic expenses as well as tuition fees for students enrolled in military academies. Mr. Phong's major complaint is that his job frequently requires him to be away from his family and the stimulating life of Hanoi and to be posted in remote areas.⁶⁰ There is little prestige associated with such postings, which offer no access to modern modes of leisure and consumption.

The attraction of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City is that they are becoming bastions of modernity, with a population eager to consume technology, leisure, music, and fashion.⁶¹ Today, foreign channels such as MTV or CNN are accessible almost everywhere, and television is the most important source of entertainment for a large proportion of Vietnamese: 44 percent of the population in the age group fifteen to twenty-nine years, 52 percent of the population in the age group thirty to forty-nine years, and 50 percent of the group fifty years old and older, according to the 2001 World Values Survey.⁶² Opportunities for exposure to Western ideas of modernity through this medium are therefore available, despite the state controlling provincial TV stations' content and Vietnamese Television broadcasting its programs all over the country.⁶³ The national media are also promoting the notion of modernity by presenting more and more stories of successful young entrepreneurs.⁶⁴ Even films depict these new urban youngsters full of personal ambition who want to amass money and realize upward mobility in terms of lifestyle, such as the character Tuan in the Vietnamese film *Returning* (1995).⁶⁵ Hence, we should not be surprised that in 2005–6, 27 percent of eighteen- to twenty-nine-year-olds thought that competition was a good thing; among the remaining survey participants, on a scale of 1 (*competition is good*) to 10 (*competition is harmful*), 27 percent were positioned between 2 and 4 (33 percent were neutral, 5 on the scale).⁶⁶ Capitalism, with its promises of profit and its spirit of competition, is an attractive road to consumption, a more Westernized lifestyle, and individual successes.

Generational Changes

The move away from a communist ideology is correlated with youngsters' lack of enthusiasm for joining the Communist Party. Apparently, only 5 percent of Vietnamese in their twenties solicit membership.⁶⁷ The key political slogan under *doi moi*—"rich population, strong country, equitable, and civilized society" (*dau giao, nuoc manh, xa hoi cong bang, can minh*)—has been embraced by a large part of the population and therefore displaces the communist ideal.⁶⁸ A generational gap appears, with Phuong An Nguyen noting that youngsters today are no longer responding to

emotive political pleas from leaders of the party and state. Unlike their parents, they show no interest in participating in grand projects, such as building socialism. Rather, the youth are more interested in matters directly relevant to their lives and a wish to adopt the socioeconomic and cultural changes brought about by globalization. More precisely, they want to have time for recreational activities and realize their individual goals through professional, financial, and family successes.⁶⁹

The differences are not only generational; there are also differences between urban and rural youth. Although there is a draft in Vietnam, its application and impact vary widely from region to region, especially between the rural and urban areas. Because the government can afford to train just a very small percentage of those in the draft age, only a small number of youth are actually drafted. Many rural youth would like to join the army to escape the limited opportunities available in the countryside, but few are chosen. Mr. Hung, from Nghe An province, was happy to join the military service since “I was not having any job, so I just went. Actually, with a few exceptions, many other people from my local area all went for the national service.”⁷⁰ In contrast, many are called in the city—but most can evade the draft simply by “reaching an understanding” with the local cadres. For instance, Mr. X from Hanoi was called on for national service at the age of eighteen years in 2002. He pulled strings to avoid conscription, arguing that the military draft was only “for spoilt, ill-disciplined youth; their parents want to send them to the army for training of their character.”⁷¹ Informal discussions with Vietnamese confirm the idea that the military draft is often perceived as a viable option for the taming of delinquent youngsters.

The economic reforms have profoundly changed employment paths. Although earlier it was the state that mostly decided who would be trained and receive education and where one would live and work, especially in the urban settings, today employment trajectories are more diverse. Most young people do not count on the state to secure work for them, and government organizations and the armed forces are no longer among the most appealing prospects in the job market. Hence, in the *doi moi* era, the state no longer has the monopoly in employment opportunities.⁷² Rather, university graduates, for instance, aim for jobs in real estate, tourism, trade, and foreign enterprises; these present the best options for making money.⁷³

The young generation in Vietnam, of whom well over half are younger than sixteen years old, have grown up in a postwar nation. For them, wars belong to history; they are not part of their personal life. A cultural identity based on involvement in war is not the basis of their experience. This makes it more challenging and complex to understand what it means to be Vietnamese today. While Ho Chi Minh remains a heroic figure, there was a poll taken recently [1998] in Saigon—80 percent of the youth between 12 and 22 years old did not know the meanings of the streets named after revolutionaries who fought against the French and the Americans. On the other hand, around 80 percent recognized Madonna and Michael Jackson.⁷⁴

Partial demilitarization has been taking place because of the decreasing influence of military organizations and values in society. This process has translated into a diminishing visibility of the military in everyday life.

Table 1. 2005–6 World Values Survey

Age (Years)	18–29 (%)	30–49 (%)	50 and Older (%)
Political system: Having the army rule			
Very good	9	10	12
Fairly good	21	24	23
Fairly bad	37	30	34
Very bad	33	36	31
Confidence: The government			
A great deal	78	80	81
Willingness to fight for country	98	97	90
Aims of the country—First choice			
A high level of economic growth	17	15	21
Strong defense forces	26	26	30
People have more say about how things are done at work and in communities	25	24	29
Make cities and countryside more beautiful	31	35	29

Instead, there are shops full of fashionable consumer goods. Looking at the subculture in Hanoi, Lanca argues that one side effect of *doi moi* has been the development of a diversified popular culture in Vietnam, with a global culture that offers possibilities of different social identities for urban youngsters. While many young people are seeking to redefine their identity, some of them find inspiration at the periphery of youth culture. Observing youngsters' involvement in various scenes that display the behaviors of specific subcultures (from hip-hoppers to illegal motorbike racers), the author notes that these youth perceive themselves as being different from the mainstream but barely ever as being outside of society.⁷⁵ This notion of being different, but hardly outside of mainstream perception, could be also applied to the youngsters' perception of the armed forces. However, we have to keep in mind that most youth might have responded in a politically correct manner to the 2005–6 World Values Survey. For instance, this survey shows some variations among the different generations—eighteen to twenty-nine years old, thirty to forty-nine years old, fifty years and older—but all within a limited range, as is clear from the following table. For example, the youth are slightly less confident in the government and the army's ruling capacity than the older generations are (see Table 1). Overall, globalization has had an impact on the generational shift and in turn created a situation of uncertainty regarding the young generation's perception of the state and societal functions of the armed forces in the long term.

Parties

Interaction with and Ascendancy in the Communist Party Organization

The collapse of communism in the late 1980s had repercussions for the Vietnamese state and its armed forces. As in a typical communist system, the armed forces are

one of three clusters of power in Vietnam, the other two being the party and state bureaucracy. In the wake of the communist collapse in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union in the late 1980s, the Vietnamese Communist Party Central Committee in March 1989 took the official step of denouncing political pluralism and reaffirming the legitimacy of one-party rule. The military issued statements of strong support for this resolution. The state constitution was later modified to redefine the functions of the army so that its role would be to stand for the socialist one-party system and combat the strategy of “peaceful evolution,” which refers to the alleged plot by foreign enemies to undermine Vietnamese socialism through various political, economic, and cultural strategies. As the army newspaper stated in September 1989,

The imperialist forces’ present scheme . . . lies in their attempts to carry out a “peaceful evolution.” . . . Western countries are using pluralism and the multiparty system . . . as a deadly political weapon to discredit the Communist Party and eliminate the latter’s leading role, and to eventually deliver power into the hands of anti-socialist forces.⁷⁶

Thus, events in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union served to strengthen ties between the Communist Party and the army.⁷⁷

The military asserted that as an institution it should not be “depoliticized,” while reiterating that it was an “active arm” of the Vietnamese Communist Party’s policies during the Fifth All Army Party Organization Congress in April 1991. It was at the 1991 Seventh National Party Congress that the military representation on the VCP Central Committee showed an increase for the first time since 1960. Fifteen members of the VPA—that is, 10.2 percent—were selected to the one hundred forty-six-member Central Committee, a growth of 7.0 percent over the earlier 1986 national congress.⁷⁸ Hence, in exchange for its support to the regime during the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the military has gained political power within the state apparatus.

Since the creation of a postcolonial Vietnamese state, the military has been subordinated to the Communist Party by virtue of what is called a “dual role” elite: the same individuals fill the top positions in both the military and the party-state. This allows the party to control the military command.⁷⁹ In the 1990s, about 70 percent of all VPA officers were at the same time party members, and the overwhelming majority of the VPA’s officers from the company level upward had party membership.⁸⁰ The lack of major tension between the party and the military is because the VPA was created by the party in the 1940s, and both supported the party’s ideal of national liberation. As Lockhart argues, the roots of the VPA cannot be detached from the birth of the modern Vietnamese nation. Indeed, the army grew in strength through this protracted conflict because it displayed a new national consciousness activated by colonial rule.⁸¹

In addition, in Marxist–Leninist societies the army is an institution that is strongly politicized. The Vietnamese Communist Party insists on the indoctrination of soldiers, and most military units have a political cadre that monitors the soldiers’ ideological

training. The army stays very closely linked to ideological issues since it is still perceived as one of the principal defenders of socialism.

Currently, the Vietnamese army remains under the command of the Communist Party, but since *doi moi* the nature of army-party relations has been evolving in its political influence as well as its role in the nation. The armed forces have been able to use the political process during *doi moi* to effect changes that are beneficial to their interests, such as greater internal autonomy on professional military subjects. For instance, the military's growing economic role in financing its own operations has been legalized and institutionalized. These political and economic roles have allowed the VPA to wield greater influence in policy making.⁸²

Territorial and Rhetorical Threats

However, despite the changes that occurred as part of *doi moi*, other features of the military have preserved continuity. For instance, the existing political power of the armed forces still remains based on its traditional function—defending the nation-state from foreign aggression—despite Vietnam having reduced its troops from almost one million when Vietnamese forces withdrew from Cambodia in 1989 to about 455,000 today, while the reduction of regular active-duty troops continues. Instead, more emphasis is placed on border guards, part-time militia, and maritime police, partially in response to the threat of an attack from China.⁸³ Indeed, the real enemy today appears to be China; relations are strained over the Spratly and Paracel Archipelagos in the South China Sea, which are claimed by both China and Vietnam. Yet such a threat is not explicitly stated in the discourse on security.

It seems safer for the Vietnamese leadership to criticize U.S. foreign policies while developing civil and military contacts with the United States than to directly challenge Beijing. For instance, the official discourse regarding internal security and some of the means used to fight against the impact of the “peaceful evolution” on Vietnam underline the ambiguous position of Vietnam toward the United States and China. On one hand, Hanoi has complained about this “peaceful evolution,” an accusation that targets the United States. For instance, the army daily *Quan Doi Nhan Dan* recently stated that the armed forces rejected the allegations made by the U.S. government's annual human rights report regarding Vietnam. More generally, leaders perceive U. S. policy on human rights as a tool to intervene in the sovereignty of Vietnam and as biased, citing, for instance, the U.S. dismissal of the plight of local victims of Agent Orange.⁸⁴

Such linguistic maneuvers, what Seira Tamang calls “speech acts,” create a state of affairs where some nations cannot be named. This allows certain representations of threats and consequently has an impact on the nature of the military's tasks (in this case, monitoring civilian populations that could be influenced by “peaceful evolution”).⁸⁵ Such a reality—a polemical discourse where China is not openly named while the Chinese threat is real, especially at sea—poses limitations to demilitarization. And just as the Chinese menace limits demilitarization, the Taiwanese

situation also limits demilitarization in China. Therefore, the traditional function of the military—having a monopoly over the means of violence that can be used against potential enemies—still boosts the political power of the army within the party.

Internal Threat: The Use of the Military's Normative Power to Influence and Control the Population

However, the cultural changes brought by globalization and *doi moi* redefine some of the roles of the armed forces. The blurring of the line between the functions of protecting populations against internal threats (usually performed by the police) and defending the nation from external enemies has increased the political and economic power of the military. For example, the armed forces' political and economic influence is especially salient in regions along Vietnam's borders. More specifically, internal security issues and the need to participate in the economy were addressed through the 1998 creation of "economic defense zones" in border areas such as the highlands. By 1999, there were thirteen such zones along the borders of China, Laos, and Cambodia, thanks to an investment of US\$215 million.

Part of the thinking behind the economic defense zones is to promote the financial autonomy of the military. As Defense Minister General Pham Van Tra stated, "An economic and military combination enhances fighting capacity, improves the defense industry, allocates soldiers to key areas and, perhaps most importantly, balances the budget for all military activities." Because of the lack of governmental funding for these measures, the VPA was allowed to solicit funds from international organizations as well as utilize domestic funds.⁸⁶ In addition, these economic defense zones address a security issue, thus the effort to strengthen ties between the army and the locals. The army newspaper reported as follows:

In 2006, the Son La Military Command under the instruction of Military Zone 2 opened two courses on the H'mong and Laotian languages for 123 public relations officers in the five northern mountainous provinces of Son La, Lai Chau, Dien Bien, Lao Cai, and Tuyen Quang. During the three-month courses, trainees were provided with basic knowledge on these two languages, such as their origins and their scripts, by trainers from the provincial committee on nationalities and staff of local television and radio stations. An understanding of these languages will enable officers to have further understanding of customs and practices of people of these ethnic groups, which in turn will help them to fulfill tasks in the area, where 60 percent of the population belong to ethnic groups.⁸⁷

Thus, these economic defense zones are also areas of cultural contact among various Vietnamese groups. While the activities described above can appear at first to be humanitarian ones, they are also a mild coercive tool used to control and police populations perceived to be at risk of being contaminated by foreign ideas. More specifically, the regime is worried about the minorities in these provinces since a significant number have converted to Christianity in the past few years. Here, the army is moving beyond the mission of conventional forces to focus on the internal defense of the state.

Thus, the internal security of the country requires the army's involvement. Such evolution points to the new fears of state officials ("peaceful evolution" schemes against Vietnamese socialism) regarding national security in this globalizing world. Yet since the 1940s, the revolutionary army has already had very close ties with minorities, and Viet Minh bases were often located in minority areas, hence the party's insistence that its cadres learn minorities' languages and customs. Thus, it seems that the regime is actually revamping a previous role played by the army—building close ties with the minorities—while promoting a new function, that is, internal control of these populations. As a consequence of its intense involvement, the VPA gets a say in local government decisions, thus performing as an arm of the government.⁸⁸

Regional Competition, the Role of the Veterans in the South, and Their Marginalization

The impact of globalization and *doi moi* was not just about economic reforms, but it also opened the door for the demands of political reforms. The downsizing of the standing army reduced the economic burden of the state but brought with it social problems such as unemployment. The passage to a market-oriented economy was accompanied by urban unemployment estimated at 20 percent to 30 percent. The situation was particularly critical in South Vietnam, since the majority of the soldiers who fought in Cambodia had been recruited from the area and massively demobilized over a short period. As a means to improve their lives, in May 1986 Southern military veterans created the Club of Former Resistance Fighters (CFRF). The CFRF was founded by well-known South Vietnamese Communist Party veterans, revolutionary figures, a few generals, and other top-ranking People's Army officers such as Nguyen Ho, Ta Ba Tong, Nguyen Van Tran, La Van Liem, and Lê Gian. From first asking for a higher standard of living for veterans, the CFRF moved on to discuss issues of corruption, party leaders' incompetence, poor management of the economy, and how to promote national reconciliation.⁸⁹

The CFRF was a loyal opposition within the Communist Party itself. It had a regional and political agenda different from the party's, with a significant number of members—ten thousand by 1988—and some leaders, such as General Tran Van Tra, are still considered heroes in South Vietnam. As a means to prevent competition, the party used social closure, that is, the exclusion of a regional group (CFRF) representing the South and demanding some form of reparation for Southern Vietnamese that would have challenged the social prestige, political power, and economic advantages of the party.⁹⁰ Since 1975, the North has handled the South as a conquered territory and its people as mostly untrustworthy. Hence, Southerners' resentment is based on two counts: first, the Hanoi leadership's decision to quickly socialize the South in 1975 resulted in ruining the Southern economy; second, Hanoi has not acknowledged the Viet Cong—Southern revolutionaries—in the Vietnam War. In addition, rather than implementing a policy of national reconciliation after 1975, Hanoi leadership dispatched more than 300,000 Southerners to "long-term

reeducation”—forced labor camps in “new economic zones.”⁹¹ Thus, under some circumstances, social closure enables certain military personnel to derive benefits from their position.

The social prestige of the party would have been somewhat compromised by recognizing wrongdoing against Southerners and especially against the overseas Vietnamese. Many Southern Vietnamese believe that the exodus from their region after the Vietnam War could have been avoided if the North had not relied on such heavy-handed maneuvers. The party’s political power, and thus its economic power, could have been jeopardized by recognizing the CFRF as an equal partner—this would have led to the VCP having difficulty in controlling any reforms.⁹²

As the CFRF evolved toward a more political role, its leaders ended up being either arrested or co-opted into a state-sponsored organization, the national-level Vietnam Veterans Association; the CFRF was banned in March 1990.⁹³ Hence, a fifth member was added to the politburo: the veterans. Traditionally, there were four main entities that served as the eyes, ears, hands, and feet of the politburo—*Dang, Chinh, Cong, Thanh* (the party, the government, the unions, the youth). The addition of a fifth group reflects the changing nature of the struggle and the socio-politico-economic situation in postwar Vietnam. There was a great deal of dissension among the veterans during the demobilization after the war with Cambodia. On one hand, party members without any battle-tested service were holding positions of power and influence that allowed them to grow wealthy. On the other hand, fifty thousand Vietnamese soldiers died during the eleven-year presence in Cambodia to remove Pol Pot.⁹⁴ Many of the veterans who had served with great distinction and sacrifice during the war found themselves without any position of influence or decent means of support once they retired or were demobilized.

The founding of the Vietnam Veterans Association, with branches and chapters down to the district and village levels, was the party’s attempt to give a voice to the veterans and also provide a place where their dissension could be managed. Because most of these veterans made huge sacrifices during the protracted and difficult war, it has been a moral issue for the country to treat them with respect and help their transition into civilian life with the least amount of disruption and discrimination. The “mandate of rule” for the party would have been severely damaged if it had failed in this task. For instance, during the sixtieth anniversary—December 6, 2007—of the National Heritage Day for Veterans and Disabled Ex-Servicemen, a number of veterans’ families were granted a house, or *nhà tình nghĩa* (akin to “house of gratitude” or “house of duty”). While acknowledging the military’s historic moral authority and the country’s obligation to these fighters, the regime today struggles with a tension between the current economic needs of Vietnam and the need to take care of those who brought the nation victory in the past.

Conclusion

This article has examined the use of the army by the state in relation to society. It shows how scaling back from war can be an incentive to building institutional

capacity—in this case, developing more diversified roles for the army. In addition, large-scale demobilization does not always result in demilitarization; state officials may respond to new social conditions by legitimating new and expanded activities of the army, which in turn gives the army its sense of identity. This article supports the idea of a concurrence between the changing role of the army, in its growing economic role and as a tool to peacefully control the population, and a changing economy.

More importantly, this article has examined civil–military relations in Vietnam from a Weberian perspective by focusing on power relations and authority and, to a lesser extent, issues of life chances and social closure. The usefulness of a Weberian approach is to tell us about the stratifying notion of power in its economic, social, and political forms. We can use these notions as a means to better perceive the uneven effects of *doi moi* as they result in reduced versus expanded opportunities for groups within both society and the military. To do so, we must not only examine the military as an institution in itself but also break down the institutional hierarchy into meaningful strata, including its top officers, the rank and file, and the veterans. A similar breakdown should also be done for groups within society that bear on the wartime experience, including the revolutionary generation, the postrevolution generation, and the younger generation. Looking at the relationship among opportunity, contingency, and action allows us to grasp groups' ability—or lack thereof—to exploit new opportunities brought by the partial transition to a market society. It provides the advantage of embracing a less monolithic vision of the relations between the military and society.

A more detailed conceptual framework not only helps us to better understand Vietnam as a single case but also strengthens our analysis of the larger comparative picture. Taking a step back, we may compare the Vietnamese case to the cases of China and Cuba. While China and Vietnam share characteristics of being Asian countries with Marxist–Leninist regimes, Vietnam has not tried to curtail the role of the army in the economy, unlike China. Within the “communist civil/party–military regimes” cluster, Vietnam appears as a moderate case, between Cuba and China. Cuba is a small country in which Fidel Castro—a charismatic revolutionary leader—and his brother Raul have been able to control the dangers associated with the growing economic role of the army. On the other hand, China is an enormous country where the involvement of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in business has resulted in its growing financial autonomy from the government, hence posing a direct potential political threat if the PLA's economic interests were ever to clash with government orders.⁹⁵ With President Jiang's 1998 order to the PLA to divest itself of its many business operations, the economic role of the military as business entrepreneur has been diminished in China, in comparison to the situation in both Cuba and Vietnam. In addition, the prestige of the PLA as an institution was tarnished by a number of well-publicized corruption cases during the 1990s.⁹⁶

In contrast to Jiang, Fidel Castro and his brother Raul have the ability to wield symbolic capital because of their revolutionary past, particularly given Fidel's role

Table 2. Military in Post–Cold War Era

	Cuba	Vietnam	China
Economy	Growing	Growing	Growing–decreasing
Prestige	High	Low	Low
Power	Growing	Growing	Growing–decreasing

as the founder of the armed forces, which helps to maintain the prestige of the military.⁹⁷ However, Brian Latell has observed that the decline of the military’s historical professionalism and discipline, because of its association with commercial activities and agencies of state repression, can weaken the strength of civil–military bonds and the respect and esteem that many Cubans have for this institution (see Table 2).⁹⁸

Not only is the Vietnamese military a heterogeneous entity, but also its national, regional, local, and geographical variations matter because they give rise to social tensions that evoke aspects of the second comparative cluster I outlined earlier, that of the “post-Soviet democratizing regimes.” A common analytical thread in the literature of this cluster is to measure how successful these countries have been in making the transition to fully democratic political and military institutions.

These questions are relevant for understanding certain historical elements, such as the legacy of war and civil war, that define generational differences within society and are specific to the Vietnamese case. For instance, the unique relationship between South Vietnam and North Vietnam brings a distinctive flavor to the relation among military, power, authority (charismatic, bureaucratic), and economic development today. In South Vietnam, the plight of Vietnamese veterans and the ex-CFRF’s desire for a more participatory and democratic political system calls to mind the examples of other countries belonging to this cluster. These groups pressed the central government to be responsive to public concerns and accountable for their actions as well as abide by the values of tolerance, pluralism, and rule of law.

In sum, a Weberian approach to understanding both the state and societal functions of civil–military relations in doi moi Vietnam reveals how the possibilities to exploit new economic opportunities have been different for the armed forces as an institution, the veterans, the top officers, and the rank and file. In addition, in a society no longer at war, the armed forces have little leverage over and economic power in everyday civilian life; as an organizational entity, the armed forces can offer their members only low prestige. At the institutional level, the political and economic power of the armed forces has increased as a means of enabling the military to cope with large-scale economic change. Together with societal and generational shifts, globalization has created a situation of growing uncertainty of what the future will bring since the military is seen in a different light by contemporary youth, compared to how it was perceived in the past by older generations. Furthermore, the ongoing cultural

challenges brought about by modernization will continue to definitively affect the relationship among the younger generation, the military, and the party authorities in Vietnam.

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Notes

1. Gérard Hervouet and Carlyle A. Thayer, "Armée et Parti au Viêt-Nam: une symbiose au service de l'économie de marché," *Revue Etudes internationales* 32, 2 (June 2001): 343.
2. Carlyle A. Thayer, "Demobilization but Not Disarmament—Personnel Reductions and Force Modernization in Vietnam," in *War Force to Work Force*, ed. Natalie Parwels (Baden-Baden, Germany: Nomos, 2000), 199.
3. Ibid.; Thaveeporn Vasavakul, "Vietnam: From Revolutionary Heroes to Red Entrepreneurs," in *Coercion and Governance: The Declining Political Role of the Military in Asia*, ed. Muthiah Alagappa (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001).
4. In terms of methodology, this piece is about a single case study, which still contributes to the debates on civil–military relations since it can be compared to other cases. We indirectly compare this unit first to the post-Soviet democratizing regimes and, second, to countries that have maintained a Marxist–Leninist political system. This case study aims to be "an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units." John Gerring, "What Is a Case Study and What Is It Good For?" *American Political Science Review* 98, 2 (May 2004): 342.
5. Walter Parchomenko, "Prospects for Genuine Reform in Ukraine's Security Forces," *Armed Forces & Society* 28, 2 (Winter 2002): 284-85; Frank O. Mora, "A Comparative Study of Civil–military Relations in Cuba and China: The Effects of Bingshang," *Armed Forces & Society* 28, 2 (Winter 2002): 185-209.
6. Thus, many authors are discussing how the nations have been able to establish legislation and institutions that provide for democratic control of the military: effective parliament oversight, civil experts within the ministry of defense, and a free press that can debate over the military. For instance, Ulrich discusses the incomplete democratic transition of the

- national security system in the Czech Republic and Slovakia and the need to create "national security professionalism." Marybeth Peterson Ulrich, "Developing Mature National Security Systems in Post-communist States: The Czech Republic and Slovakia," *Armed Forces & Society* 28, 3 (Spring 2002): 403-25.
7. Natalie Mychajyszyn, "Civil-military Relations in Post-Soviet Ukraine: Implications for Domestic and Regional Stability," 456-58; David J. Betz, "No Place for a Civilian? Russian Defense Management from Yeltsin to Putin," 482; Mark Yaniszewski, "Post-communist Civil-military Reform in Poland and Hungary: Progress and Problems," 385-402; all in *Armed Forces & Society* 28, 3 (Spring 2002).
 8. Frank O. Mora and Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Economic Reform and the Military: China, Cuba, and Syria in Comparative Perspective," *International Journal of Contemporary Sociology* 44, 2 (2003): 87-128.
 9. See Cuba Transition Project at http://havanajournal.com/cuban_americans/entry/cuba-transition-project-conference-on-the-future-of-cuba-summary/, 3.
 10. See Mora, "A Comparative Study of Civil-military Relations in Cuba and China," 185-209.
 11. Frank O. Mora, "Explaining Military Support for Policy Change in China, Cuba, and Vietnam: Civil-military Typologies and Explanatory Variables," http://www.cubastudygroup.org/_files/ChinaCubaandVietnam.pdf.
 12. Hervouet and Thayer, "Armée et Parti au Viêt-Nam," 340.
 13. Vasavakul, "Vietnam," 339-40.
 14. Greg Lockhart, *Nation in Arms: The Origins of the People's Army of Vietnam* (Sydney, Australia: Allen and Unwin, 1989), 19-20.
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 19. *Ibid.*, 5.
 20. Thayer, "Demobilization but Not Disarmament," 211-13.
 21. VACR refers to small-scale complex farming that attempts to reduce the use of agricultural chemicals and chemical fertilizers.
 22. *Quan Doi Nhan Dan*, March 22, 2007.
 23. Carlyle A. Thayer, "The Economic and Commercial Roles of the Vietnamese People's Army," *Asian Perspective* 24, 2 (2000): 105.
 24. Lawrence E. Grinter, "Vietnam's Thrust into Globalization: Doi Moi's Long Road," *Asian Affairs, An American Review* 33, 3 (Fall 2006): 5.
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 26. Carlyle A. Thayer, "Vietnam 2001: The Ninth Party Congress and After," *Asian Survey* 42, 1 (2001): 82.

27. *Quan Doi Nhan Dan*, February 14, 2007.
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Bio

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