

On Vietnam's Foreign Strategic Space during Renewal (Doi Moi) Time, since 1986

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Abstract Since the renewal time (1986), the strategic space in general and the foreign space in particular of Vietnam have been gradually promoted and progressed in favour of the national construction and development. That fact results from the transformation from the approach which was mostly the politic ideology - class-based thought in association, alliance, organization and force gathering into multilateralizing and diversifying the relations, giving top priority to the national-fatherland interests and being active in international integration. However, Vietnam's diplomatic strategic space is facing the challenge mostly due to increase in strategic competition among the big countries, especially the geopolitic ambition of China and cyber-security. For this reason, Vietnam should reach more typical actions such as promoting the studies, planning the foreign strategies, enhancing the communication and diplomatic affairs, combining the fights in all aspects, consisting of politic-economic, cultural and legal foreign affairs, attracting more resources, strengthening, intensifying and connecting the internal forces, including renewing the politic system and reinforcing the national defence power in order to protect and enlarge the foreign space for Vietnam's more favorable career of national construction and development in the current context.

Keywords: Strategic space, foreign policy, Vietnam, the Renewal (Doi Moi) time.

Introduction

There have been great deal of studies on Vietnam's foreign ties in general and the foreign strategies/policies in particular during the Renewal time. The typical studies may be mentioned as "Vietnam's diplomacy 1945 - 2000" (Bo Ngoai giao Viet Nam 2004), "Vietnam's renewal foreign policy (1986 - 2010)" (Pham Quang Minh 2012), "Vietnam's multilateral foreign affairs during time of active international integration" (Le Hoai Trung cb. 2017), "Vietnamese foreign policy in transition" (Thayer Carlyle A. , Amer Ramses (ed) 1999), "Changing worlds : Vietnam's transition from cold war to globalization" (Elliott W.P. David 2012), "Vietnam's foreign policy in an eva

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of rising Sino-US competition and increasing domestic political influence” (Thayer Carlyle A 2017) v.v.. Nevertheless, it is considered essential to keep assessing both success and limitations, identifying new opportunities and challenges related to Vietnam’s foreign affairs, especially in the context where the US - Chinese relationship is put under the increasing tenseness and where the security is becoming more urgent. Moreover, the original document sources (official documents of the Party and the State of Việt Nam) and the geopolitic, geostrategic approaches and foreign policy, considering the movements of the strategic space under the influence of strategic thought and actions of the government in the international relations from time to time and during the different periods are widely used. Scholars argue that, precisely because of the variables of strategic thinking and time requires policy makers to always grasp the situation and innovate strategic thinking to take appropriate steps, mobilize resources, create a reasonable security and development space for our country. And the foreign policy of a country depends not only on its domestic factors, its position in the international system, but also the products of that system. The pressure or impact from the international system of both positive and negative directions on a country can help guide or adjust a national strategic action, including foreign policy. This forces national leaders to consider from many sides, factors, including space and time to formulate and implement policies (Strausz- Hupe Robert 1942), (Gideon Rose 1998: 144-172), (Le Dinh Tinh 2017: 7-35). The above are the basis for clarifying the movements of foreign policy in general, the strategic foreign space in particular of Vietnam from 1986 up to now.

1. Overview on Vietnam’s foreign strategic space before the Renewal time (before 1986)

Since erstwhile, the Vietnamese got familiar with taking advantages of and combining “clement climate”, “favourable terrain” and “concord among the people” in building and protecting the Fatherland. The schemes against the aggressors coming from the North, especially establishing the defence lines along with the Northern East border of the Fatherland, the actions of “Southward marches” for enlarging towards the South, “Eastward marches” or “Seaward marches” for exploiting and confirming the sovereignty over the Biên Dong (South China Sea), combining the firm against-aggressor military method with flexible foreign affairs, particularly the “diplomatic tribute” and “diplomatic marriage”, are the geostrategic actions with the aim to lay out the foundation for the national development and security. However, being strongly influenced by the Confucianism, underestimating the private trading, overestimating the land over the sea, not considering the foreign trade, especially the sea trading, as the important path to enlarge the strategic space, Vietnam’s feudal state became increasingly out-of-date, leading to being invaded and governed by the French for almost one century (Tran Khanh 2015: 3-12), (Thanh The Vy 1961 : 23-28).

After 1954, the French was removed from Vietnam, both regimes, which were

Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV)¹ and Republic of Vietnam (RV)², in spite of difference in terms of alliance, association and gathering of forces, showed the similarity which was taking full advantages or relying on the external resources in order to establish, reinforce and enlarge the strategic space, firstly with the aim to maintain the politic regime. Concurrently, both own good awareness of importance of the national sovereignty and integrity³, wishing that Vietnam would become unified, powerful and active in international cooperation⁴. However, it was the influence of politic ideology - class-based thought and war-due damages that these two regimes in Vietnam did not understand fully “the game” of power between major countries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2008: 45-54). That fact prevented Vietnam from taking full advantages of geographic location and international opportunities for national renewal. Yet, during the war for national unification, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam established relatively perfect military and diplomatic strategic space by opening a lobby towards Laos and Cambodia, building the Ho Chi Minh paths on these two countries in order to dispatch the troops, provide logistics for the wars, also by setting up the border-connection with China, Soviet, attaining supports from the world peace-lovers through public diplomacy (Vietnam’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2004: 179-216), (Vu Duong Ninh 2014 : 149-261).

After 1975, the unified Vietnam started a more practical point of view on the national interest from the international relations, especially from the relations with China and ASEAN countries. Vietnam understood China’s geopolitic ambition, therefore showed the great determination in fighting for the territory sovereignty, fighting against the invasion from the South West and North of the Fatherland (Vietnam’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1979: 86). In tandem with that, Vietnam also made new efforts to improve the relations with ASEAN countries (Vietnam’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2004: 298-301). However, in this time, Vietnam not yet comprehended the geopolitic game between big powers, the tend of globalization and regionalization, especially, not yet understood the global role and power of United States, goal and nature of the relation between US - China as well as the crisis of the

¹ Democratic Republic of Vietnam was established on 02/09/1945. The country was renamed as Socialist Republic of Vietnam in 1976.

² The Republic of Vietnam regime was formed on 26/10/1955 and the election of independent national assembly was organized on 04/03/1956, then the Constitution of the First Republic was issued on 26/10/1956.

³ The Republic of Vietnam regime performed the sovereignty over Hoang Sa (Paracel Islands) and Truong Sa (Spratly Islands) in accordance with Geneva Agreement 1954 such as dispatching the troops to protect the islands, assigning the delegations to survey and develop the economic projects, especially the oil projects, as well as institutionalizing the administration and fights through foreign affairs to protect these islands. However, Beijing has taken advantage of weakening of Republic of Vietnam to occupy Hoang Sa in mid January 1974. Previously (in 1956), Taiwan also made corrupt use of Vietnam’s South - North separation and the establishment of new government in Saigon to occupy Truong Sa’s Ba Binh island. In 1970, the Philippines also launched to occupy many islands of Truong Sa such as Song Tu Dong, Thi Tu, Loi Ta and so on.

⁴ Saigon government was also active in joining the International organizations such as International Civil Aviation Organization -ICAO (1954), World Meteorological Organization –WMO (1955), World Bank - WB (1956), International Monetary Fund -IMF (1965, Asia Development Bank –ADB (1966), etc.

Socialist system (Tran Khanh 2014: 174-180). If only after first years of unification did Vietnam actively grasp the chances, establish the diplomatic ties with other countries, especially the America, Vietnam's strategic space would reach the quick height and the border wars in the North and South West launched by the enemies in late 1970s might be avoided, evenly, the isolation and embargo from the developed countries might also be limited (Vietnam's Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2004: 313-314), (Vu Duong Ninh 2014: 272-273).

2. Awareness renewal and strategic actions for enlarging of Vietnam's foreign space from 1986 to 2020

2. 1. Awareness renewal

Every renewal of foreign policies was based on the thought, understanding of the world situation and national demands, with thorough assessment of the world tendency being considered the most important. The sixth Party Congress dated 12/1986 of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) marked the Vietnam's renewal of strategic thought, firstly in terms of awareness, evolution approach to times, which emphasizes on co-existence and cooperation during the peaceful time between the socialism system and the capitalist system (no thinking of "who win whom") and great development of science - technology and globalization (Communist Party of Vietnam 2010, Part I: 27-28). Since this time, Vietnam approached new viewpoint on the national security and understood that it was a must to prosecute the comprehensive security, where 1) the economy should be strong; 2) the national defence should be powerful; 3) The foreign fairs and cooperation should be enlarged, and concurrently it was requested to give priority to the policy of "more friends, less enemies", diversifying the international relations on basis of respecting the independence, sovereignty and mutual benefits. It was also penetrated by Vietnam that "no opposition should exist between the two groups of countries, there should be the comprehensive policies with the Southeast Asia, focusing on increasing cooperation with the regional countries" (Pham Quang Minh 2012: 60).

It should mention the key breakthrough in Vietnam's geostrategic awareness and actions during early 1990s. For the first time, the document of the Sixth Party Congress 1991 of the Communist Party of Vietnam underlined the international economic cooperation and considered it as the indispensable tendency as well as highlighted the geographical aspect as the foundation and resources of the foreign affairs policy⁵. At the same time, the Party also declared that "Vietnam wishes to make friend with all of countries" (Communist Party of Vietnam 2010, Part I: 403) and this spirit was repeated in the Document of the Eighth Congress (1996) (Communist Party of Vietnam 2010,

⁵ In the Report "Strategy of socio-economic stabilization and development until 2000" declared in the Seventh Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam, it was mentioned that "Vietnam was one of countries with the world most dynamic economic development located on the important international routes consisting of many easy paths to the sea (favourable for some regional countries and territories), in addition, our country was advantageous for developing the foreign economic relation, attracting foreign investments, promoting trading activities and services of aviation, marine, tourism and so on" (Communist Party of Vietnam (2010), *Document of Nationwide Delegate Congress in time of renewal* (6th, 7th, 8th, 9th and 10th Session), Part I, Hanoi: Publisher of National Politics, 2010, Page 429-430.

Part I: 636, 701). By time of Ninth Congress (2001), the Party added that “Vietnam is willing to become friend of all countries in the world” and it was the first time when the term “integration” is not only used but also emphasized as “proactive in international economic integration” (Communist Party of Vietnam 2010, Part II: 34). The thought of foreign affairs and international integration was more clarified in the Tenth Congress (2006), indicating that “Vietnam is the trusted friend and partner of all countries and always actively joins the international and regional cooperation process” (Communist Party of Vietnam 2010, Part II: 312, 375). Under that spirit, by time of Eleventh Congress (2011), it was added to make it full that Vietnam was not only the trusted friend and partner, but also the “responsible member of the international community” (Communist Party of Vietnam 2011: 236).

It should be noticed that since the first decades of 21st century, Vietnam reached thorough understanding of the situation and thought that “The multi-polar world situation is increasingly specified, the tendency of democratization in international relations keeps going up but the powerful countries will still govern the international relations” (Communist Party of Vietnam 2011: 183) and “It is the highlight in present time that the countries with different social regimes and development levels are co-existing, both cooperating, fighting and competing hardly for the national interests” (Vietnamese Government 2011). Concurrently, the Party also identified the tendency, fluctuation speed and sophistication of the relations among the powerful countries, the world’s centres of power, especially the influence of their strategic changes, that “the world situation under the multi-polar and multi-centre tendency is developing in faster manner. The powerful countries change the strategy in manner of both cooperating, negotiating and competing, limiting mutually, placing the big impact on the world and regional situation” (Communist Party of Vietnam 2016: 71).

In tandem with identifying features of the era, the approach to international economic integration, friends, enemies, ourselves, partners in international relations also goes with big changes. Firstly about international economic integration: Resolution 07-NQ/TW dated 27/11/2001 by the Ministry of Politics detailing the “International economic integration”, highlighting that Vietnam should promote the process of world and regional integration by actively and proactively joining the bilateral and multilateral institutions, especially AFTA and WTO (Communist Party of Vietnam 2001).

In parallel with promoting the international economic integration, since this time, Vietnam kept launching the strategic renewals in relation to alliance, association and force gathering as well as the friend - enemy relation in international relations. The details were provided in the Resolution on “Strategy of Fatherland protection in the new situation” issued by the 8th National Meeting, 9th Session dated 12/07/2003, mentioning that “The countries respecting the independence, sovereignty, establishing and expanding the friendship, fair and mutual-benefit cooperation with Vietnam are our partners; And every force showing the plots against our goals in the career of Fatherland development and protection is our subject”. At the same time, it was also indicated in the Resolution that “There should be the dialectic viewpoint: the subject (enemy) may show good things to cooperate; the partner may show difference and conflict with us. For this reason, it was

requested to remove the equivocality, neglectfulness or rigidity in awareness, policies and in dealing with specific issues” (Central Committee of Thought and Culture 2003). Next, Resolution 28 of the 11th Party 2013 on “Strategy of Fatherland protection in the new situation” inherited basic contents of 8th Central Resolution 2003, underlining further the strategic principles, flexibility in dealing with partners and subjects as well as overestimating the national unity and interest in international relations (Tran Dai Quang 2015). These thoughts were also mentioned in the Document of 12th Nationwide Party Congress 2016, that Vietnam “do not dependent on any country, always be flexible in dealing and active in promoting and nursing the relations with the partners, especially the strategic partners and powerful countries important for the national development and security with the aim to realize practically the confirmed relations” (Communist Party of Vietnam 2016: 155). Moreover, also during this time, it was Vietnam’s policy to boost up the national defence affairs in the comprehensive manner. This was presented in the document of the Party Congress that “proactive in joining the multi-lateral mechanisms related to national defence, including cooperating further such as peace protection launched by the United Nations, non-traditional security rehearsal and other activities” (Communist Party of Vietnam 2016: 155). It could be said that the 8th Central Resolution, 9th Session dated 2003 as well as the addition and confirmation as detailed in the Document of 12th Party Congress 2016 was the big turning-point in terms of strategic thought for Vietnam to enlarge the strategic space, especially the economy, security and diplomatic defence.

One more noticeable thing was that Vietnam, since second decade of 21st century, renewed the awareness of national defence policies. While Vietnam’s national defence White Book 2009 highlighted “three not” policy, which was not joining the military alliances, not permitting any country to build military base in Vietnam and not relying on this country to fight against the other”, the White Book 2019 dated 25/11/2019 added one principle “not using any force or not threatening to use any force in international relations” (Ministry of National Defence 2019: 25) In addition, White Book 2019 also indicated that Vietnam was entitled to act and build military cooperation with other countries if necessary “depending on the practical developments and in the specific situations, Vietnam will consider building the appropriate national defence and military relations on basis of respecting the mutual independence, sovereignty, unification and integrity as well as the basic principles of the international laws, cooperating for mutual benefit and for shared interests of the region and international community” (Ministry of National Defence 2019: 25). Despite the said additional criteria and principles were normal in the international relations, in the context where Vietnam’s sovereignty and security on East Sea (Bien Dong) were very challenging, this declaration was considered as to confirm the respect and compliance with international laws as well as Vietnam’s self-defence right as mentioned in the Charter of the United Nations.

Furthermore, it was also publicly stated in Vietnam’s National Defence White Book 2019 that “Vietnam will willingly welcome navy ships, sea police ships, border guard ships from the countries and international organizations for courtesy visits, normal visits, repairing, logistics, technique, natural disaster shelter” (Ministry of

National Defence 2019: 30). In the background where many countries were reluctant towards China and did not want to publicly support the marine freedom on the East Sea and while China desired to limit or remove the countries currently owning the sovereignty over this sea from the external cooperation, this declaration was one of the evidences to prove Vietnam's determination in national defence integration and sovereignty protection on the Bien Dong (East Sea).

In addition, since 1990s, new awareness of sea geostrategy was grasped. Also since this time, Vietnam started considering sea economic development as the cutting-edge sector and understood that sea economic development should go with reinforcing the security - national defence and international economic integration. This was specified in the Document of 7th Party Congress (1991) and in the Document No 03-NQ/TW dated 26/05/1993 detailing Some tasks of sea economic development in the years to come, Vietnam was "anchored to national strategy of sea exploitation and protection" (Communist Party of Vietnam 2010, Part I: 329). Since 8th Congress (1996), the document stressed exploiting full potentiality and advantage of the seas, developing and combining economic sectors as well as building the big economic centres and sea urban areas, focusing on the island economic development, controlling the water territories and continental shelf, proving the sovereignty over the special economic zones (Communist Party of Vietnam 2010, Part I :775-777).

It should be noticed that in 2007, Vietnam launched the by-2020 Vietnam Sea Strategy, emphasizing that Vietnam should become the powerful sea country (Communist Party of Vietnam 2007). The thought of making Vietnam a powerful sea country was detailed more in the Vietnam Sea Law approved in 2012 and particularly in Resolution 36, 8th Central Meeting, 12th Session dated 22/10/2018 on "Strategy of Vietnam Sea Economic Development by 2030 with vision by 2045", indicating that Vietnam "should become powerful in seas, rich from seas, attain the sustainable development, security and safety, and the sustainable economic development should be in parallel with stable national defence - security, independence, sovereignty, integrity, green growth, preservation of biodiversity and sea ecosystems and so on", and that "Vietnam is determined and patient in fighting to protect the legal sovereignty and interests over the seas, as well as actively and proactively solve the disputes and conflicts over the seas with the peaceful solutions in compliance with the international laws, especially the Convention of the United Nations on Sea Law 1982, preserving the peaceful, stable and cooperative environment for development." (Communist Party of Vietnam 2018).

2.2. Results of the strategic actions

It is the renewal of strategic thoughts that Vietnam together with related parties solved successfully and comprehensively the Cambodian issues and normalized the relation with China in 1991, set up diplomatic ties with EU in 1990, with US and joined ASEAN in 1995, established cooperative relationship with international financial, monetary organizations such as International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank (WB), Asia Development Bank (ADB), actively joined other global and regional

cooperative organizations such as ASEM, APEC, WTO and so on. Until July 2020, Vietnam set up the official diplomatic ties with 186/193 member countries of the United Nations, placed the economic - commercial cooperation with 230 countries and territories, became the active member of more than 70 international and regional organizations and platforms, developed 17 strategic relationships and comprehensive strategic relationships with other countries, 04 of them were voteable members of the United Nations Security Council, consisting of Russia, China, United Kingdom and France⁶. It also should be remembered that Vietnam has been showing the fervency to the thorough international integration, firstly the ASEAN community, the Asia - Pacific Cooperation Forum, signing the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). In addition, Vietnam is approaching the multi-lateral cooperation in national defence, security, also joining the peace protection force of the United Nations, taking part in over-sea security - national defence rehearsals⁷. Especially, Vietnam has made spectacular progression in every aspects, from politic - foreign affairs, economic - trading, education - training to security - national defence with US. In a short period of time, the relation between these two former enemies has transformed into the comprehensive relation and increasingly reached the practical mutual benefits⁸. That has made an important addition for Vietnam to not only break the isolation but also improve the position and prestige in the world, making Vietnam further well-known, respected and cooperated by other countries.

It should be further emphasized that behaving in the manner that Vietnam is not only the trusted friend and partner but also the responsible member of the international community is the key factor to improve quickly Vietnam's position and prestige. This is partially proved by that Vietnam was chosen by US and North Korea as the destination for the second peace negotiation dated in early 2019 and was voted by the international community as the 2020 - 2021 non-standing Member of the United Nations Security

⁶ Among them, there are 03 comprehensive strategic partners of Russia, China and India. Other 14 are the strategic relations, consisting of UK, France, Italy, Spain, Japan, South Korea, Australia, Germany, Newzeland and 5 ASEAN countries (Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines).

⁷ In 2014, Vietnam marked the official membership of the United Nations' Green Berets functioned to protect the peace. Since 2018, Vietnam joined increasingly every companies. Year 2019 was also the year when Vietnam officially joined the shared military exercises between US and ASEAN countries.

⁸ In 1995, the diplomatic tie between Vietnam and US was normalized. In 2000, both countries signed the Bilateral Trading Agreement (BTA) and in 2006, US provided Vietnam the normal trading policies and the Most Favoured Nation regulations. In 2008, both countries came to an agreement on the annual discussion on politics, security and national defence, and in 2010, the deputy-minister national defence strategic Discussion mechanism was developed. Both countries in 2011 signed the Memorandum of National Defence Cooperation and in 2013 established the comprehensive partnership. Year 2015 marked the event where the General Secretary of Communist Party of Vietnam Nguyen Phu Trong visited America, considered the "historic turning-point". In 2016, US declared fully removing the embargo of selling anti-personnel weapons to Vietnam, added Vietnam to Southeast Asia Marine Security Initiative and provided patrol-boats to Vietnam. While Vietnam - US bilateral trading in 1995 was recorded at USD 450 million only, the year 2019 reported an increase by 134 times, reaching the amount of USD 77 billion, and US became the third-largest trading partner (after China and South Korea) and the biggest surplus-export market of Vietnam. By 2019, Vietnam was ranked top of ASEAN and 6th of the countries with the most overseas students in US, about 30,000 students. About 1,200 US are studying in Vietnam.

Council with 192/193 for-votes. At the same time, that Vietnam is successful in winning the Covid-19 domestically and has shared the experience and medical facilities with many other countries as well as always active and proactive in raising the issue of epidemic prevention and fighting to the ASEAN agenda 2020 highly appreciated by the international community is also another proof for Vietnam's international success. That achievement paves the way for the relatively appropriate strategic space to maintain Vietnam's security, integration and development as well as enhance Vietnam's contribution to the world, laying out the foundation for new progression and higher position in the coming years.

2.3. Limitations and considerations

2.3.1. Limitations

Despite the Vietnam's foreign space has been enlarged, not yet profoundly and sustainably. The strategic partnership and comprehensive strategic partnership developed by Vietnam are the way to improve the foreign relations, national position and enlarge the strategic space for security and development (Pham Binh Minh 2014) but in fact, most of those relations do not create big influence on Vietnam's security and development, especially the protection of national sovereignty and security. For example, Vietnam has set up the comprehensive strategic relation with 3 countries of China, Russia and India but the strategic faith between Vietnam and China is going down. Whereas the economic relation between Vietnam and Russia & India has not yet matched with the reality. In addition, the "inflation" regarding the strategic and comprehensive strategic relation also causes much difficulty to Vietnam and the related parties in selecting, gathering the resources to promote the bilateral relations despite Vietnam has been very flexible and careful in identifying partners, friends and enemies in every international relations and always considers the national interests as the top priority. Moreover, the patience in being open, reforming and prosecuting the mutual benefits with the external partners has helped Vietnam gradually minimize the pressure of democracy and human right from America and Western countries, so that enlarging the strategic space internationally. However, the goal and principle "For a Vietnam of socialist" in tandem with the national interests are still prosecuted (Pham Binh Minh 2011). Concurrently, it is still confirmed by the Communist Party of Vietnam that this era is "transition to socialism", and that "on basis of the man's evolution of history, the socialism will be a must" (Vietnamese Government 2011). These things causes more or less challenges in gathering the forces, especially in calling supports from the capitalist-based countries.

There are many reasons for the above mention, partially persuaded by the Marxist ideology, partially Vietnam does not own the full understanding of the power "game" of the great countries as well as Vietnam's geopolitic position fluctuation in the changing of world's powerfull structure (Tran Khanh 2019: 199-224).

2.3.2. Considerations

From successes and limitations in building the foreign strategic space, many considerations should be raised, both theoretically and practically. Firstly, regarding the reasoning, it is required to study various approaches concerning the space, power, national interest and global interest in the international relations, including the theory on geopolitics, geostrategy and then referring them to the new international context where the fluctuation, complication and unpredictability are the challenges. This not only diversifies the objects, scientific approaches, but also provides the foundation, resources and instruments to plan, predict and carry out the national policies, immediately the foreign affairs.

Practically, in addition to keep prosecuting the policies of multilateralization, diversification, becoming friends of all countries, promoting international integration, Vietnam should pay special attention to “decode” the US - China relation, solve the disputes and bottle-neck related to the China and US relation, especially the democracy - human right with US, and at the same time the relationship of “comrade”, “sibling”, “mountain to mountain, river to river” with the neighbouring China who is very geopolitically ambitious. More importantly, it is necessary to enhance the economic, security and national defence relation with America, boost up the all-aspect relations with other developed and medium countries such as Japan, Russia, India, South Korea, Australia and other powerful countries included in the European Union such as Germany, United Kingdom, France and at the same time give hand to develop the shared house of ASEAN and set up the full connection with the Southeast Asia countries, including the military cooperation and multilateral cooperation. This is one of the most important foundations and external resources to help enhance the efficiency and enlarge the security space and strategic safety for Vietnam in response to the China’s geopolitic pressure.

A big issue is that how Vietnam can “balance” and be always steadfast in response to the strategic calling and competition among the powerful countries in the region. The strategic competition among the powerful countries, especially the US - China relation, in this hand enhances Vietnam’s geopolitic position but in the other hand limits Vietnam’s strategic space to prosecute the “balanced diplomacy” in the relations with the powerful countries. To go through the “narrow door”, firstly the narrow door in balancing the relations with US and China, Vietnam should both prosecute the multilateral and diversified relations, especially strengthening the relations with the powerful countries and the multilateral institutions, consisting of ASEAN, and improve the internal force, desire for independence and for a powerful Vietnam. It is said by President Ho Chi Minh that “Big power will make foreign affairs win. Power is the drum and diplomatics is the sound. The drum is big, the sound is also big”⁹.

Vietnam is prosecuting the policy of “Four No”¹⁰, consisting of no military alliance

⁹ Ho Chi Minh (2000) *Full volume* (2000), Volume 4, Hanoi: Publisher of National Politics, Page 126.

¹⁰ Before 2019, Vietnam applied the policy of Three Not, consisting of 1) not joining the military alliances; 2) not permitting any country to build military base in Vietnam and 3) not using and not threatening use of forces. Vietnam’s National Defence White Book 2019 added one principle “not using or threatening use of forces in international relations”.

with other countries and no use of forces. However, in the context where China is sparing no effort to monopolize the East Sea, damaging Vietnam's national security and sovereignty over this sea, Vietnam should prepare the spare solution such as setting up the strategic alliance with the powerful countries, particularly the US, so that Vietnam is always ready and well-prepared if China launches any war. This is the legitimate right of every nation and country recognized and admitted in the United Nations Charter. This is also reflected in Vietnam's National Defence White Book 2019 (Ministry of National Defence 2019: 25).

In tandem with building and enlarging the strategic space around the country, Vietnam should enhance the strategic feature of the geographical location by creating the connection between lands, islands, seas and the air on basis of developing the technological and social infrastructure. This will rapidly enhance quality of the Vietnam's maritime frontage toward Western Pacific Ocean and facilitate the land-based connections through the border gates, especially the countries in mainland Southeast Asia, removing the disadvantages of Vietnam's narrow width. The consequential achievements of this process help create more "geopolitic resources" for Vietnam.

In parallel, it is advised for Vietnam to strengthen and activate further the national will, pride and indomitability, consisting of creating the connection between 96.2 million of Vietnamese people and more 4 million of overseas Vietnamese ones. Concurrently, Vietnam should show the ambition of quickly becoming the "medium powerful country" to walk abreast with other powerful ones. Vietnam has understood and kept prosecuting, however, the process is not synchronous, still slow and lacks the instruments and the levers.

In addition, it is also necessary to protect the space of security and development on the East Sea (Bien Dong) in all aspects, including the legal instruments, suing China to the international court, enhancing the task of communication and public foreign affairs as well as setting up the cooperative relationship for technology study and development, especially the technologies related to seas and cyber security network. At the same time, Vietnam should pay attention to improving the military power, developing many plans to fight against the wars if any. The most important thing is to boost up the national solidarity so that every Vietnamese person, both domestic and overseas, may gain more profound awareness of the Fatherland's sovereignty. These are the solutions to develop the national combined power which are also feasible to protect and enlarge Vietnam's security and development space currently and in the coming decades.

Conclusion

Since the renewal time (1986), Vietnam has made great progression in renewing the strategic thought and actions towards developing and protecting the Fatherland, building and enlarging the foreign strategic space. Since this time, Vietnam also focuses on the policies of "more friends, less enemies", multilateralization and diversification of international relations. For this reason, Vietnam's security and development space is increasingly strengthened and enlarged. At present, Vietnam is being anchored to the tradition of mutual understanding and friendliness with neighbouring countries,

“justice to win brutality, humanity to beat ruthlessness”, combining the national power with tendency, power of the present era, strengthening the internal forces, taking full advantage of external forces, enlarging the strategic depth by keeping being open, integrating and joining actively the international events. However, it is constant that Vietnam always faces pressure in terms of security and development from powerful countries, especially the geopolitic ambition of China. Vietnam’s living space is being challenged, particularly the seas and the cyber security network. For this reason, Vietnam should reach more typical actions such as promoting the studies, planning the strategies, enhancing the communication and foreign affairs, combining the fights in all aspects, consisting of politic-economic, cultural and legal foreign affairs, attracting more resources, strengthening, intensifying and connecting the internal forces, reinforcing the national defence power in order to protect and enlarge the foreign strategic space for Vietnam’s more favorable career of national construction and development in the current context.

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