



Research Article

Vietnam's position in the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy: Challenges and implications

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ABSTRACT

Since it was rejuvenated by then - U.S. President Donald Trump in 2017, the Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS) has been in the spotlight and received attention from many countries within and without the Indo-Pacific region. Due to its geopolitical and geostrategic value, Vietnam has been considered an important factor assisting the U.S. to accomplish two main goals of IPS: reaffirming the U.S. presence and influence in the Indo-Pacific region, and constraining the emergence and expansion of China. Both the Trump and Biden administrations have been paying more attention to Vietnam and granted it a crucial position in the IPS in particular and the U.S foreign policy in general. This paper aims to clarify the significant role of Vietnam in the IPS. It also attempts to examine Vietnam's current policy on how to exploit the IPS advantages, promote a better national image on the international stage and engage in more multilateral cooperations.

Keywords: *Vietnam in Indo-Pacific Strategy; U.S. Foreign Policy; U.S.-Vietnam Relations*

1. INTRODUCTION

Three decades after the *Doi Moi* economic change in 1986, Vietnam's economy witnessed a significant uplift. From the inflation rate of 487.3% in 1986, Vietnam elevated itself into the 'low-middle income' group of economies by achieving the gross national income (GNI) per capita of US\$1,030 in 2009 (Le Hong Hiep, 2018). Today, many foreign enterprises find Vietnam to be a new, attractive market with a thriving economy. As Vietnam adopted an international relations strategy that was autonomous, open, diverse, and multilateralized, diplomatic ties with its former adversaries from the Cold War and the Vietnam War were also repaired. Among these, the U.S.-Vietnam relationship could be considered a textbook for the old saying "There are no permanent enemies, and no permanent friends, only permanent interests."

The bilateral relationship between Vietnam and the U.S. has continued to improve since diplomatic normalization took place in 1995, notably in the defense and strategic fields. Since its admission to ASEAN in 1995, Vietnam has participated responsibly and actively in numerous global organizations with an ASEAN focus. The relevance of President Donald Trump in the region was furthered when he described Vietnam as "the very heart of the Indo-Pacific" at the 2017 APEC CEO Summit in Da Nang. (Trump, 2017). Since then, two successive U.S. administrations have prioritized enhancing ties with Vietnam as part of their



Indo-Pacific strategy. Thus, this essay seeks to address the following three questions: (1) How does Vietnam fit into the American Indo-Pacific Strategy as well as the Indo-Pacific region? What role has Vietnam played in the US's Indo-Pacific Strategy? (3) How can Vietnam benefit from the Indo-Pacific Strategy without compromising its independence or entering the war between the United States and China?

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed of review analysis approach. The material resources in various types, for example synthesizing and analyzing books, scientific papers, news articles. Government documents such as the National Security Strategy and National Defense Strategy issued by the White House, the U.S. Department of States and the Department of Defense, announcements issued by the U.S. Embassy & Consulate in Vietnam, and diplomatic statements made by the U.S. and Vietnam officials also serve as valuable primary sources of information. Thematic development employed in data analysis to explore of emphazic themes and sub-themes which were discussed relevant to the Vietnam's position in the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy in challenges situations. The discussion covers in multi-sides for further implication and benefits to stakeholders.

2.1. THE IMPORTANCE OF VIETNAM IN THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION

In terms of geostrategic value, Vietnam is considered to as "the very heart of the Indo-Pacific" and acts as a bridge between Southeast and Northeast Asia as well as mainland and maritime Southeast Asia (Trump, 2017). Geographically, Vietnam serves as a de facto impediment to Chinese maritime growth (Abbott, 2021). In other words, China needs to open the door to Vietnam if it wants to travel to the Pacific and Southeast Asia.

As a result, the US views Vietnam as a growing ally in its Indo-Pacific Strategy to counter China. On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the US and Vietnam, Washington made a commitment "to a strong and independent Vietnam and a peaceful and prosperous Indo-Pacific region" (Pompeo, 2020a). On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the normalization of U.S.-Vietnam relations in July 2020, a piece in Beijing's official tabloid Global Times stated: "Vietnam has long been a country the US wants to take advantage of to geopolitically contain China" (Li, 2020), demonstrating that even the Chinese understood the geostrategic significance of Vietnam to the U.S.

In terms of economic value, As a result, the US views Vietnam as a growing ally in its Indo-Pacific Strategy to counter China. Vietnam will be "strong and independent, peaceful, and have one of the world's fastest-growing economies," according to a pledge made by Washington. It has already multiplied by more than 30. (Trump, 2017). Trade between the United States and Vietnam hit a record high of \$52 billion in 2016. Vietnam is now the United States' fastest-growing export market, with shipments increasing by 77% between 2014 and 2016 (Thayer, 2018). Vietnam's GDP is predicted by the World Bank to reach 281.35 billion dollars in 2017 (2022). With a total commercial turnover of US\$424.9 billion in the same year, Vietnam is one of the most open economies in the region (Le Hong Hiep, 2018).

In contrast to the Philippines, Thailand, and two other Southeast Asian allies, trade between the United States and Vietnam expanded from virtually nothing in 1975 to over US\$92 billion in 2020 (Ordaniel, 2021).

In terms of defense capacity and diplomacy, Vietnam has been one of the top arms importers in the world, having made many purchases of cutting-edge weaponry to support its air force and navy. During his trip to Hanoi in May 2016, President Obama declared the complete lifting of the embargo on sales of lethal weapons to Vietnam. This made it possible for the United States to build a tighter relationship in maritime security with Vietnam's quickly growing military and allowed Vietnam to purchase weaponry from the United States and its other allies (Hiebert, 2016).

Vietnam has strengthened its air and naval capabilities to boost its level of deterrence against any military threats in the South China Sea. Vietnam is also seeking to develop its own military industry by producing a range of weapons and equipment (Le Hong Hiep, 2018). Vietnam's ability to successfully mediate between superpowers was on display when it hosted the 2017 APEC meeting and released two key joint statements with the US and China. Vietnam's stature and reputation were once more highlighted when Hanoi was chosen as the venue for the second Trump-Kim summit in 2019 (Choong, 2021).

2.2. THE POSITION OF VIETNAM IN THE U.S. INDO-PACIFIC STRATEGY

Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore were identified as growing security and economic partners in the U.S. 2017 National Security Strategy, and it hoped to deepen ties with these four nations as well as support them in becoming cooperative marine partners (The White House, 2017). The commitment of the United States to "strengthen security relationships with partners in Southeast Asia, including Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaysia" was reaffirmed in the 2019 Indo-Pacific Strategy Report (Department of Defense, 2019).

For some reason, the United States placed Vietnam ahead of Indonesia and Malaysia on the lists of emerging Southeast Asian security partners in both reports, indicating that Washington is attempting to fortify its ties with Vietnam in response to China's rise and potential threat to the United States' hegemony in the region (Le Hong Hiep, 2020).

The number of high-level diplomatic meetings between the two countries has increased as Vietnam has taken on a bigger role in the IPS in particular and in U.S. foreign policy as a whole. Nguyen Xuan Phuc, the prime minister of Vietnam, traveled to the United States from May 29 to May 31, 2017, as an official government representative, at the White House's request (Office of the Press Secretary, 2017). He was the first leader of Southeast Asia to meet President Trump since Trump's inauguration. Trump, in turn, created history in November 2017 when, during his first year in office, he traveled to Vietnam for the first time.

In 2017 and 2019, he made history by becoming the only American president to visit Vietnam twice during a single term (Tu Lai, 2021). High-ranking Vietnamese Minister of National Defense Ngo Xuan Lich was officially welcomed to Washington by U.S. Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis in August 2017. The two men talked on matters of regional security as well as the growing defense relationship between the United States and Vietnam (U.S. Embassy & Consulate in Vietnam, 2017).

During a visit to Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam, in late January 2018, Defense Secretary James N. Mattis referred to the US and Vietnam as "like-minded partners" in relation to the US. Additionally, he emphasized the United States' commitment to working with friends like Vietnam to defend the free and open rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific area (U.S. Department of Defense, 2018). One-tenth of all senators from the United States visited Vietnam in 2019—even though the country is an ally (Tu Lai, 2021).

While President Biden was in office, Vietnam kept its place in the IPS. When U.S. President Joe Biden launched his Indo-Pacific Strategy in February 2022, Vietnam was listed with India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia, New Zealand, Singapore, Taiwan, and the Pacific Islands (The White House, 2022a).

From July 26 to July 29, 2021, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin visited three countries in Southeast Asia, including Vietnam. Vietnam is currently facing the most difficult challenges as a result of China's aggressive behavior and increasing navy modernization in the South China Sea (Strangio, 2021a), therefore the decision to include these three countries indicated a calculation by Biden's administration. Between August 21 through August 26, 2021, Vice President Kamala Harris visited Singapore and Vietnam.

In addition to garnering support for the Biden administration's initiative to counter China's expanding global influence, the trip's goals were to demonstrate that the United States had returned to an important part of the world. In his speech A Free and Open Indo-Pacific delivered in Indonesia on December 14, 2021, Secretary of State Antony Blinken reaffirmed the United States' commitment to strengthening strategic alliances with other countries in the region, particularly Singapore, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia (Blinken, 2021). On May 13, 2022, at a meeting with Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh at the U.S. Department of State in Washington, D.C., Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken noted the amazing trajectory in the relations between the United States and Vietnam. The United States strongly supports a strong, independent, and prosperous Vietnam, he underscored, adding that "we are now the strongest of partners, with a shared vision for security in the region we share and for the strongest possible economic ties" (U.S. Department of State, 2022a).

Wendy Sherman, the deputy secretary of state for the United States, traveled to Vietnam from June 10–13, 2022. In conversations with senior Vietnamese authorities, Deputy Secretary Sherman stressed numerous times the strength of the U.S.-Vietnam Comprehensive Partnership and the support of the United States for a strong, prosperous, and independent Vietnam (U.S. Department of State, 2022b).

3. THE U.S. ASSISTANCE FOR VIETNAM IN REGIONAL SECURITY ARCHITECTURE

3.1. TRADITIONAL SECURITY

The United States has been providing security assistance to strengthen Vietnam's defense capabilities in response to China's growing aggressiveness in the South China Sea and the Indo-Pacific. Small patrol boats, Scan Eagle unmanned aerial vehicles, T-6 trainer aircraft, an ex-U.S. Coast Guard high-endurance cutter, and its associated maintenance and training facilities are all included in this support. After more than 50 years of service in the

U.S. Coast Guard, the Hamilton-class cutter (WHEC-722) was formally transferred to the Vietnam Coast Guard in May 2017.

The U.S. military also takes part in numerous annual training exchanges and events in an effort to strengthen bilateral cooperation and interoperability with the Vietnam People's Army, Air Force, Navy, and Coast Guard. Additionally, the Department of Defense (DoD) provided training and technical support for Vietnam's 2018 deployment of a medical unit to the United Nations Peacekeeping Mission in South Sudan, and it will continue to do so for future deployments in 2019. In the study *A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision*, released in November 2019 (U.S. Department of States, 2019), the United States committed to improving ties with Vietnam, which will chair ASEAN in 2020.

In the last 10 years, the United States has tried to strengthen its strategic connections with Vietnam because it sees Vietnam as a potential future security ally. The United States also backed Vietnam in its territorial disputes with China in the South China Sea. According to a statement from the U.S. State Department, China breached Vietnam's exclusive economic zone and continental shelf on August 22, 2019, close to Vanguard Bank (Le Hong Hiep, 2020). On July 13, 2020, Washington made plain its stance on marine resources and jurisdiction in the South China Sea. The United States opposes any PRC maritime claim in the waters surrounding Vanguard Bank, according to Mike Pompeo, who was the secretary of state at the time (Pompeo, 2020b).

Security-related concerns are another area of cooperation between Vietnam and the US. The USS Carl Vinson made its first port call to Da Nang, Vietnam, following the end of the Vietnam War in March 2018 (U.S. Department of States, 2019). In order to reiterate how the U.S.-Vietnam collaboration contributes to peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region, Admiral Philip Davidson, the commander of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM), and Secretary of Defense Mark Esper visited Vietnam in 2019 (U.S. Embassy & Consulate in Vietnam, 2019a, 2019b).

Vietnam participated in Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC), the largest multilateral naval exercise in the world and one that is run by the United States, for the first time in 2018 (Choong, 2021). In March 2020, the American aircraft carrier Theodore Roosevelt will make its second port visit to Vietnam. The fact that both parties were willing to continue with the visit despite the COVID-19 outbreak demonstrated an improvement in confidence between Washington and Hanoi (Sharman, 2020). The United States sold, transferred, and helped Vietnam improve its marine capability to address security problems in the South China Sea when President Donald Trump was in office (Le Hong Hiep, 2020). Regularly held high-level defense dialogues, such as the Defense Policy Dialogue (DPD) and Political, Security, and Defense Dialogue (PSDD), give defense officials from the two militaries a place to discuss defense and security topics of shared interest (Tu Lai, 2021).

3.3. NON-TRADITIONAL SECURITY

3.3.1. A Free and Open Indo-Pacific:

Considering the Mekong region, which includes Vietnam, to be strategically significant to the U.S., *Advancing a Shared Vision* committed to helping Vietnam address new non-traditional security challenges, such as debt dependency, a dam-building frenzy that

concentrates control over downstream flows, extraterritorial river patrols, an increase in organized crime and trafficking, etc. The Infrastructure Transaction and Assistance Network (ITAN), which provided advice to Vietnam on its Power Development Plan, including how to draw private investment, was established by the United States in July 2018. With order to assist Vietnam with choosing Virginia-based AES Corp. as the receiver of the \$3 billion Son My LNG import facility and Son My 2 2.2GW combined cycle gas power plant project, the United States launched Asia EDGE in 2018. By strengthening Vietnam's customs department's ability to adhere to international trade standards, the new trade facilitation project from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) aims to accelerate and streamline commerce (U.S. Department of State, 2019). Vietnam's initiatives to reform its higher education system are also supported by USAID.

BUILD-IT (Building University-Industry Learning and Development Through Innovation and Technology) was created to help Vietnam modernize its STEM programs in higher education (U.S. Department of States, 2019). In order to produce knowledgeable and skilled graduates who can address the country's health challenges and modernize its healthcare industry, the Improving Access, Curriculum and Teaching in Medical Education and Emerging Diseases (IMPACT-MED) Alliance seeks to modernize the medical education curriculum and teaching methods in Vietnam [2016–2022, \$8.7 million]. Three Vietnamese colleges will be upgraded as part of a five-year project [2021–2026] funded by USAID and costing \$14.2 million (USAID, 2022).

The United States has received a lot of cooperation from Vietnam in its fight against the pandemic during the COVID-19 outbreak. Vice President Kamala Harris attended the opening ceremony of the Southeast Asia office of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Hanoi while she was in Vietnam in August 2021, and she also took part in an online meeting with the health ministers of ASEAN members (Strangio, 2021b).

By 2022, the United States had donated nearly 40 million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine to Vietnam, and USAID had allocated \$23.46 million for COVID-19 assistance. This assistance included setting up laboratory systems, supporting technical experts for preparedness and response, preventing infections in healthcare facilities, providing public health screening at points of entry, and reducing the pandemic's effects on the Vietnamese economy. Vietnam has successfully launched a quick vaccination strategy and shifted to effectively controlling the epidemic thanks to the timely availability of vaccinations from nations such as the U.S.

3.4. VIETNAM'S PERSPECTIVES TOWARDS INDO-PACIFIC STRATEGY

Given that it is China's neighbor and does not want to be regarded as supporting the US, Vietnam does not want to cause China unnecessary annoyance. Therefore, it is unlikely that Vietnam will publicly support the Indo-Pacific Strategy. For Washington, the best-case scenario is a steadily increasing level of political, economic, and security co-operation that encourages Hanoi to contribute more to the Indo-Pacific Strategy.

However, in light of China's most recent escalation of aggression in the South China Sea, Hanoi has inadvertently supported the Indo-Pacific Strategy. When he visited India in March 2018, then-President Tran Dai Quang used the phrase "Indo-Asia-Pacific" in his statement on bilateral ties to convey "the belief that the Indo-Asia-Pacific is vast enough

for every country to flourish and prosper" (Tran Dai Quang, 2018). Following the meeting, the two countries issued a joint statement in which they "reiterated the importance of achieving an Indo-Pacific region that is peaceful and prosperous and where sovereignty and international law, freedom of navigation and overflight, sustainable development, and a free, fair, and open trade and investment system are respected." The Ministry of External Affairs in 2018. At the national level, Hanoi is notifying Beijing that the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy is advantageous to Vietnam's national security interests by using the phrase "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy" in its 2019 White Paper on Defense (Ministry of National Defence, 2019). By approving the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific published on June 22, 2019, Vietnam has additionally implicitly supported the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy at the regional level (ASEAN, 2019).

The former vice minister of foreign affairs and ambassador to the United States, Pham Quang Vinh, most recently said on August 8, 2022 at a conference held by Fulbright University Vietnam in collaboration with the U.S. Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City to commemorate 27 years of normalized diplomatic relations between Vietnam and the U.S., "With the Indo-Pacific strategy, there are a wide range of areas that the region, including Vietnam, can work together with the U.S. We share a lot of common interests, such as the maintenance of this region's peace, stability, and development as a result of the rule of law and international law. Vietnam Fulbright University, 2022.

In short, the U.S. presence and military support in the region are undeniable and unstoppable, despite Vietnam's efforts to avoid provoking China. After all, preserving Vietnam's independence and defending its territorial integrity are its top priorities. With the "Four Nos" policy (no military alliances, no aligning with one nation against another, no foreign military bases or troops on Vietnamese territory, and no using force or threatening to use force in international relations) and "One Depend" policy (depending on circumstances and particular conditions, Vietnam will consider developing necessary, appropriate defense and military relations with other nations), its 2019 White Paper on Defense does a good job of serving this goal (M). Vietnam will profit the most if China does not breach the red line.

Vietnam has improved its connections with other nations recently, particularly with the three other Quad members Japan, India, and Australia, in an effort to avoid the unrest caused by Sino-American competition. A "strategic partnership" was changed to a "extensive strategic partnership" between Japan and Vietnam in 2014. The India-Vietnam relationship was upgraded to a "comprehensive strategic partnership" in 2016 from a "strategic partnership." Australia announced its intention to transform its bilateral relations with Vietnam from a "strategic partnership" to a "comprehensive strategic partnership" in November 2020. Most recently, Vietnam took part in a Quad-Plus gathering with South Korea, New Zealand, and the Quad. Vietnam is strongly suggesting to China that it might consider collaborating with the United States and its allies in the Indo-Pacific to ensure the freedom of navigation and the upholding of international law in the region (Choong, 2021).

3.5. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR VIETNAM IN IPS

First, Human rights in Vietnam have been a source of diplomatic conflict since the middle of the 1990s. Americans' advocacy for democracy and human rights is still seen throughout

the country as a challenge to the power and rule of the Vietnamese Communist Party. The US Congress, on the other hand, frequently struggles to approve measures that might benefit Vietnam due to concerns about civil liberties. The situation has changed in the era of rivalry between the US and China. Although Vietnam's history of human rights violations has long been a source of concern that prompted the U.S. Congress to reconsider extending military sales to Vietnam, the strategic geopolitical significance of improving Vietnam's maritime security capability is so obvious that the Obama administration announced in 2016 that the ban on sales of lethal weapons to Vietnam would be lifted.

It is perhaps a symptom of decreased Congressional concern for human rights abuses and governance issues in Vietnam given China's assertiveness in the South China Sea and the increased emphasis on maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific. Although Vietnam's record on human rights has been a consideration in the partnership, it hasn't prevented the two countries' expanding security cooperation over time (Abbott, 2021).

Second, The American Indo-Pacific Strategy is seen negatively by Vietnam. Because of the U.S. involvement's frequent unpredictable and chaotic nature, neighboring countries like Vietnam are concerned about the American commitment's long-term viability (Shambaugh, 2018). The United States' commitment has already led to skepticism among its friends. After 9/11, the Bush administration concentrated mostly on the Middle East (Campbell, 2016). Under the Obama administration, the pivot to Asia-Pacific was viewed as more rhetorical than practical (Shambaugh, 2020). Vietnam has strong reason to be skeptical about the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy's long-term viability and its capacity to successfully prevent Chinese aggression in the South China Sea given the aforementioned concerns (Grossman, 2020).

Political economy is "the single aspect of statecraft most crucial to the stability of the Indo-Pacific region" and "the arena of policy where China has done more to displace the United States than in any other," so the United States needs to take more initiatives in this area as well as in military cooperation (Jackson, 2022). As a result of President Trump's decision to withdraw the United States from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade agreement, Vietnam is one of several countries that is dissatisfied and worried about the United States' engagement in the regional economic architecture.

For Vietnam, signing up for the TPP provided access to the American and Pacific markets as well as a push to leave "China's orbit," especially in terms of the country's economic dependence. Trump's withdrawal hurt the U.S. prestige, which was terrible news for Vietnam. President Biden established the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) on May 23, 2022, with a dozen founding partners, including Vietnam (The White House, 2022b), in order to deepen American links to the regional economy. The U.S., a nation infamous for its dull economic participation, is a major factor in how quickly IPEF can demonstrate its success. Along with military cooperation, the United States must strengthen its economic ties with Vietnam as part of the Indo-Pacific Strategy in order to free that country from China's powerful influence.

Vietnam's participation in the TPP gave it access to the American and Pacific markets and pushed it out of "China's orbit," especially in light of its economic dependence on that nation. Trump's withdrawal damaged American credibility, which was bad news for Vietnam. To strengthen American ties to the regional economy, President Biden formed

the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) on May 23, 2022, with the support of a dozen founding partners, including Vietnam (The White House, 2022b). How swiftly IPEF can show its performance depends in large part on the U.S., a country notorious for its drab economic engagement. As part of the Indo-Pacific Strategy, the United States must enhance its economic connections with Vietnam in addition to its military cooperation in order to liberate that country from China's powerful influence

Third, Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is causing anxiety among China's neighbors, while Washington frequently ignores Vietnam's worries throughout the rest of Indochina. The neighboring nations of Laos and Cambodia are likely to join China. The last thing Vietnam wants is to be surrounded by nations that support China and incorporated into the periphery of China's influence. Vietnam will therefore be interested in learning more about the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy's implications for Indochina, particularly in light of recent rumors that China intends to build air and naval bases in Cambodia. For Vietnam to participate more actively in the former's IPS, the U.S. must be more prepared to cooperate with Hanoi in addressing the detrimental effects of BRI (Grossman, 2020).

3.6. IMPLICATIONS FOR VIETNAM

With support from the US and other allies, Vietnam may increase its capabilities in infrastructure, energy security, cyber security, education, etc., strengthening its total national might. Vietnam could actively participate in initiatives of the Indo-Pacific Strategy, including IPEF, military joint-exercises, defense equipment procurement, intelligence sharing, cyber security cooperation, technology transfers, training, and economic growth cooperation, with the United States and many other like-minded nations that share the same ideals about "a free and open Indo-Pacific in which all nations, large and small, are secure in their sovereignty and can pursue economic growth cooperatively.

Additional political changes must be made in Vietnam, particularly to bolster its institutions and reduce corruption. The country can consider alternatives including fighting corruption, maintaining budgetary accountability, promoting democracy, fostering youth development, media freedom, and defending basic liberties and human rights.

The S-shaped country, which is caught in the middle of US-China rivalry and competition, has been seeking to take a neutral posture. Each nation's most cherished possessions are the maintenance of its independence, national sovereignty, geographical integrity, and political stability. Vietnam must maintain a healthy economy and strengthen its security capabilities if it is to become more independent. Vietnam should typically rely on its own resources and not those of outsiders, even though it can ask for outside assistance to address its security challenges. On the other side, Vietnam can strengthen its ties with other regional middle powers like Australia, Japan, South Korea, South Korea, and India. As a result, the nation will have more options and chances for bilateral and multilateral collaboration while avoiding getting caught into the rivalry between the United States and China.

4. CONCLUSION

Since the launch of *Doi Moi*, Vietnam has rejuvenated itself and actively participated in regional and world affairs, becoming an integral part to the security structure of the

Southeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific regions. Vietnam's position has been reinforced since the U.S. granted it a significant role in its Indo-Pacific Strategy for three reasons. First, both countries share common misgivings on China. Second, the vibrant development of Vietnam provided many opportunities for American businesses. Third, with its significant military development over the past decade, Vietnam now has become one of the most powerful armed forces in Southeast Asia.

Playing a part in the Indo-Pacific Strategy has provided Vietnam with both opportunities and challenges. As long as the country makes the most out of IPS while avoiding provoking China, it is likely to maintain a neutral stance and gain enough space to develop its own national interests. Vietnam should also continue to engage with all powers on both sides of the Indian and Pacific Oceans and take full advantage of the opportunities that arise from cooperation and competition between the major powers. Considering the intensifying conflict among major powers in the Southeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific region, it is advisable for Vietnam to make deliberate moves to maximize its benefits and eschew major powers competition.

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