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MARITIME SECURITY POLICY OF INDIA IN EARLY 21ST CENTURY: VIETNAM'S PERCEPTION OF ITS IMPLICATION ON THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

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ABSTRACT

Since the early 21st century, the Asia-Pacific has become a dynamic region of development by some powerful countries in the world such as the United States (US), India, China, and Russia. Thus, the issue of ensuring maritime security to develop sea trade plays a central role in the strategies of these countries. From India's perspective, maritime security in the Indian Ocean – Pacific Ocean is a deciding factor in the development, affirming its position and creating a balance of power in the country in comparison with other countries in the region. Nevertheless, the developed sea trade of India has faced challenges from various countries including the US, and China. Therefore, India has promoted a cooperative relationship with Vietnam to guarantee maritime security for Indian traders in the region. This paper aims to provide general information about maritime security as well as to determine and estimate India's maritime security strategies.

Additionally, it will present the role of Vietnam in India's maritime security policies. The findings show that both nations, India and Vietnam have adequate backup strategies, which is the foundation for developing sea trade sustainability. Furthermore, India and Vietnam will play an increasingly strong role in the Asia-Pacific in the future.

Keywords: India, maritime security, the Asia-Pacific, Vietnam.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of maritime security is linked to organizations such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) was adopted on December 10, 1982 by The United Nations and the Council of the European Union (2014). The laws and regulations of maritime was founded, firstly, UNCLOS show that:

The regime of passage through straits used for international navigation established in this Part shall not in other respects affect the legal status of the waters forming such straits or the exercise by the States bordering the straits of their sovereignty or jurisdiction over such waters and their air space, bed and subsoil (The United Nations, 1982, Article 34).

In other words, "Maritime security is understood as a state of affairs of the global maritime domain, in which international law and national law are enforced, freedom of navigation is guaranteed and citizens, infrastructure, transport, the environment and marine resources are protected" (Council of the European Union, 2014).

The role of maritime, firstly, is shown in world trade as reported by the US Department of the Navy (2007) that maritime trade is increasingly important to the development of many countries in the world because maritime trade "... supports 90% of the world's trade, it carries the lifeblood of a global system that links every country on earth". Therefore, all countries have concerns with the issue of maritime security. Maritime security has been of interest to many researchers and organisations (Ho, 2008; McNicholas, 2016; US Department of

the Navy, 2007). For instance, the US Department of the Navy (2007) stated that stated that:

The creation and maintenance of security at sea is essential to mitigating threats short of war, including piracy, terrorism, weapons proliferation, drug trafficking, and other illicit activities. Countering these irregular and transnational threats protects our homeland, enhances global stability, and secures freedom of navigation for the benefit of all nations.

Additionally, maritime security has a close relationship with national security, where protecting safe commerce at sea is also protecting a developed country. The role of ensuring maritime security is as important as land security between many countries. It can be seen in the report of the US Department of the Navy, in which they assessed that “*Protecting vital sea lanes also represent a growing priority, as seaborne trade has more than quadrupled over the last four decades and now accounts for 90 percent of all international commerce and two-thirds of global petroleum trade*” (Ho, 2008).

Moreover, maritime security is the most important for many coastal countries because seas are seen as the way of merchandise transfer around the world as Joy (2021) stated that “*Maritime security is one of the major concerns and challenges for coastal countries biggest challenges of a country, Sea is an important factor for a country for different kinds of trade relations and other factors.*” Therefore, ensuring the security of freedom at sea is important to all countries around the world. Nations must give a hand to resolve disagreements and conflicts in order to ensure maritime trade and minimize barriers in developing maritime trade.

Maritime security has been understood with many different connotations and often includes traditional security (e.g. volatile situations at sea, military modernization and the risk of armies using conflict war parties) and non-traditional security (e.g. safety of navigation, marine environmental protection, biodiversity or sustainability for human livelihood). However, the main content of maritime security is to emphasize the importance of maintaining order in the use and management of the sea for human development. In areas where sovereignty and maritime disputes are escalating

particularly in the South China Sea, maintaining maritime security is of utmost importance. McNicholas (2016) argued that:

Maritime security is a relatively narrow term, it has often emphasised the angle of security in using the sea for transport and commercial purposes. Under the basis, piracy, armed robbery at sea or accidents and incidents between ships are becoming threats to maritime security.

In addition, the threats of maritime security was also found in the study by Tan (2011) which indicated the following: (1) many of the vulnerabilities that have led to pirate attacks also apply to terrorism, including inadequate coastal surveillance, lax port security, a profusion of targets, the overwhelming dependence of maritime trade on congested choke points, and a reduction in the number of ship crew; (2) the necessary training and equipment for carrying out maritime attacks exist in the commercial industry; (3) maritime attacks offer an additional means of causing economic disruption, particularly in view of the overwhelming dependence on seaborne trade; (4) maritime terrorists could inflict mass casualties by attacking cruise ships or passenger ferries; and (5) the global container shipping industry offers a logistical channel for the covert movement of terrorists and their weapons.

In consonant with this view, the US Department of the Navy claimed that maritime security is “*another priority as the US Navy joins navies and coast guards around the world to police the global commons and suppress common threats short of war, like piracy, terrorism, weapons proliferation, drug trafficking and other illicit activities*” (Ho, 2008). The US also emphasised that the most important target of maritime security is the cooperation between countries to solve disputes and conflicts at sea and at the same time, to prevent the risk of conflict that could lead to war. This is not only the goal of the US but also the common mission of all countries in the world.

Consequently, maritime security is approached from the perspective of non-traditional security, ensuring the development of commerce by sea route trade of many countries. The direct threats to maritime security are armed piracy and accidents between boats. Thus, maritime security is of utmost importance to ensure safety, prevent recurrence and to overcome consequences of the abovementioned issues.

Indian Maritime Security Policy

It is the authors' view in this article to clarify the content of the maritime security policy of India. India implemented the "Look East" policy in 1992 for the Asia-Pacific region in general and the East Sea in particular. Hence, in the beginning of the 21st century, the Indian government made a further push to involve Asia by upgrading its "Look East" policy to "Act East" policy. These policies contributed towards developing a strong Indian economy and India became one of the active members in international relations in Asia.

The Indian maritime security policy has been of interest to many researchers, organizations, and leaders of India (Brewster, 2016; Drishti, 2020; Gopal, 2020; Indian Navy, Ministry of Defence, 2015; Singh, 2016). According to Singh (2016):

India "is seeking to increase its security and economic cooperation with the entire Asia-Pacific region. India's interest in the Asia-Pacific is not just of strategic nature but has serious economic imperatives. The developed markets of Northeast Asia and developing markets of Southeast Asia offer immense economic opportunities for New Delhi".

The rapid development of India is associated with the dynamic development of the Indo-Pacific region. This has enabled India to play a proactive role by advocating increased cooperative relationships with other countries in the region and specifically, in its marine trade strategy to face potential challenges. As reiterated by Singh (2017) when he quoted President Modi who "*stressed the need to bring countries together on the basis of respect for international law. Freedom of navigation and the adherence to international norms is essential for peace and economic growth in the... inter-linked marine geography of the Indo-Pacific*".

In addition, maritime trade has increasingly played an important role since the beginning of the 21st century in the development of India because "*India is centrally located between the eastern and western stretches of the Indian Ocean, thereby able to deploy naval forces in both directions more easily than other littoral states in the Indian Ocean*" (Drishti, 2020). India's exports and imports have remained mostly across the shipping lanes of the Indian Ocean. Consequently, secure sea lanes of communication (SLOCs) have been a key security

issue for India in the 21st century (Drishti, 2020). According to Khurana (2017):

India's central position in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), astride the main international shipping lanes (ISLs), accords distinct advantages. It places the outer fringes of the IOR and most choke points almost equidistant from India, thereby facilitating reach, sustenance and mobility of its maritime forces across the region. India is, therefore, well-positioned to influence the maritime space, and promote and safeguard its national maritime interests, across the IOR.

However, Khurana (2017) added that India's maritime security has also encountered difficulties such as enhanced insecurities, a diminutive role in the Western Pacific, geopolitics, and the China Factor. Thus, the maritime domain awareness (MDA) and the identification of potential risks that influence maritime operations are the key elements of the Indian government's maritime security operations. Further, MDA is *"the effective understanding of anything associated with the maritime domain that could impact the security, safety, economy, or the marine environment"* (International Maritime Organization, 2018). Additionally, the importance of MDA is emphasized, *"Maritime domain awareness (MDA) provides a backbone for the overall issues in maritime security cooperation. Strengthening MDA would serve as an enabler for other sectorial and functional cooperation in larger maritime security issues and would build trust and confidence"* (Brewster, 2016).

Gopal (2020) posited that:

"Maritime domain awareness (MDA) is a particularly important yet challenging task, considering the complexity of the maritime neighbourhood in which it seeks to attain its strategic objectives. India's doctrinal articulations rightly identify MDA as a key operational enabler across the spectrum of maritime operations".

Therefore, the Indian Navy has formed a maritime security strategy for the country since 2007. Eight years later, in 2015, the Ministry of Defence (Navy) released a comprehensive report on the development and role of the Indian Navy in national maritime security. India's

maritime benefits based on India's Ministry of Defence (Navy) (2015), was addressed in its new strategy which included the following:

- *Protect India's sovereignty and territorial integrity against threats in the maritime environment;*
- *Promote safety and security of Indian citizens, shipping, fishing, trade, energy supply, assets and resources in the maritime domain;*
- *Pursue peace, stability and security in India's maritime zones, maritime neighbourhood and other areas of maritime interest; and*
- *Preserve and project other national interests in the maritime dimension*

Thus, the maritime security has played an important role and directly affects the development of India. The most important goal in maritime security is to protect sovereignty and territorial integrity, ensure safe sea activities such as cargo transportation, fishing, etc. Further, the perception of the role of maritime security has changed, maritime security is not only a mere maritime field but is also closely related to national sovereignty and security. This awareness is a prerequisite condition for India to invest in the navy forces in order to do well at sea missions, and to serve the country's development. Any issues that are considered potentially harmful to maritime security objectives specifically, and national security in general must be prevented and eliminated. Therefore, India must strengthen its collaboration with all countries concerned in the spirit of peace, and cooperation for the common benefit of all countries and India.

Vietnam's Role in Indian Maritime Security Policy

In 1972, Vietnam and India formalised diplomatic relations between the two countries. According to Ton (2018, pp. 26–27) in 2003:

The two states elevated their relationship to a comprehensive partnership, and in 2007, during an official visit to India by the then Prime Minister, Nguyen Tan Dung, Vietnam and India agreed to elevate their relationship to the level of strategic partnership ... Defence and security cooperation have emerged as important pillars of the Vietnam-India strategic relationship.

Until today, this relationship has resulted in many important achievements in the field of economy, politics, culture–society, etc.

Firstly, India is one of the top 10 investment countries of Vietnam. Pranay Verma (2020), the then ambassador of India in Vietnam affirmed that “*India ranked as the seventh-largest trading partner of Viet Nam with bilateral trade of about US\$12 billion*”. The level of economic ties between the two countries has grown faster as “*This is still not commensurate with the levels of our economic development and the fact that we both are among the fastest-growing economies in the world today*” (Verma, 2020).

Aside from these achievements, maritime security cooperation is also a concern of the governments of the two countries. Vietnam is increasingly important to India’s maritime security policy. There are five similarities that can be seen in both India and Vietnam:

Firstly, the geostrategic similarity of Vietnam and India is the most fundamental factor in improving the cooperation of the two countries in maritime security. As mentioned, India has important geostrategic strategy and advantages for marine trade development with three sides of the sea. Historically, when waterways had yet to developed, India was surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean, which separated the country from the rest of the world. However, in recent years, with the rapid maritime development, its position has become a favourable factor for the development of marine trade. Mishra (2014) confirmed this with further details that India “*by virtue of its 7,500 km long coastline which juts into the Indian Ocean with two strategic outposts of Lakshadweep and Andaman, is a maritime power with naval ambitions and vulnerabilities*”. Beside the two outposts, India has 13 main ports and 176 small ports that are important advantages for New Delhi to focus on marine economic investment. Therefore, the value of India’s sea trade is constantly increasing and plays an important role in the development of India. According to the India’s Ministry of Defence (Navy) (2015):

Merchandise trade constitutes 42% of India’s GDP, and can be expected to increase in the future. More than 90% of India’s international trade by volume and over 70% by value is carried over the seas. The total size of the Indian shipping industry has been growing over the years, even as the relative share of Indian flagged shipping in the country’s external trade has declined, from about 40% in the 1980s to approximately 8.5% in 2014.

This report confirmed the position of the maritime industry for the development of India. Nowadays, the development of navigation is closely related to the development of the nation. To confirm this statement, the then President of India Shri Pranab Mukherjee said that:

A nation's social and economic well being is intricately linked to the seas, not only for trade but also how it faces threats to its own security that develop across the seas ... our resolve to achieve high growth can be realised only if our maritime frontiers and assets are safe, stable and act as enablers. The Indian Navy, as the primary element of India's maritime power, has the challenging task of safeguarding the country's maritime interests (India's Ministry of Defence Navy, 2015).

Similarly, Vietnam has a long coastline with “3,260 km coastline which extends along almost the entire western part of the South China Sea” (Ton, 2018, p. 4) and there are 26/63 coastal provinces, and coastal land. With a large coastal area and many ports and bays, Vietnam also has many favourable conditions for marine trade development. Along the length of its coast, Vietnam has more than 100 locations where ports can be built, and many places for international transshipment ports. In addition, Vietnam also has 125 large and small beaches with warm sunshine all year round, fresh air with beautiful landscapes, which are excellent for building resorts, and high-end tourism. Therefore, exploiting the potential value from its marine resources is important to Vietnam's national development strategy. Tien's (2011) study confirmed this:

Accounts for 42% the land area and 45% population, with nearly 15.5 million people living near the coast and 16,000 people live on Vietnam islands. On the Vietnam coast, there are many rocky capes which reach out close to the sea that create the 'magnificent natural mountains' such as Ngang Pass, Hai Van Pass, Ca Pass.

This perception proved that the close relationship between the development of maritime trade and the Indian economy, and between maritime security and national security. Additionally, the position of the South China Sea, where Vietnam is located, is very important for India as affirmed by Ton (2018, p. 27):

India's interests in the South China Sea centre on its trade and economic engagement with ASEAN and Northeast Asia, as well as its growing strategic interests in the region" and "with approximately 55% of India's seaborne trade passing through the South China Sea, maintaining security and freedom of navigation in the region is critical to India.

Therefore, based on the points presented, the Indian government needs to determine the right position and role of maritime security in order to formulate the necessary development policies. Vietnam plays a key role in India's strategy in the process of cooperation and ensuring the maritime security of India in the Asia Pacific.

Vietnam's history has been associated with many wars, fought mainly on land. Therefore, the national marine defence policy is of little interest to the government, as indicated in Ton's (2018, p. 6) paper that "*As a small state with a long history of conflicts on land, Vietnam's maritime strategy has been merely a subset of its national defence strategy, with the Vietnamese Navy as one component of the Vietnam People's Army (VPA)*". However, with the expansion of China in the South China Sea, the Vietnamese government realised that there are "*three major threats faced by Vietnam: economic decline, political security challenges, and territorial disputes in the South China Sea*" and "*non-traditional security issues, such as smuggling and illegal fishing in Vietnam's waters, were also deemed state security concerns*" (Ton, 2018, pp. 6–7). Thus, in recent years, the Vietnamese government has formulated various necessary policies and guidelines to develop the marine economy and maritime security. On February 9th, 2007, during the 4th Conference of the Executive Committee of Communist Party (Course 10) Resolution 09-NQ/TW was passed related to Vietnam maritime strategy up to 2020 and identified the 21st century as the "century of the oceans" that "*the sea of Vietnam has the geoecological and geopolitical important position ... with rich diversity of natural resources, the Vietnam sea has an increasingly crucial role for the development of the country*" (Quynh, 2015). In addition, Ton (2018, p. 7) also claimed that the Resolution states that Vietnam will strive to become a strong and prosperous nation of the sea by 2020, at which point the maritime and coastal economy would contribute 53% to 55 % of GDP. The resolution underlined the necessity to combine the development of society and the economy with national defence and international environmental cooperation (Ton, 2018, p. 7). In other words, Quynh (2015) summed up the key mission of Vietnam up to 2020:

Closely cooperate socio-economic development with national defence and security, international cooperation and environmental protection; the development of marine, coastal and island regions with the development of inland areas that follow with the direction of industrialisation and modernisation.

Thus, like India, since the beginning of the 20th century, the Vietnamese government has determined that the central goal of the nation has been its marine economic development for national construction, security, and defence. Vietnam must actively take the initiative in international cooperation to guarantee its maritime security. Maritime security is also closely related to domestic development, marine trade and the domestic economy so as to achieve the common goal of successfully industrialising and modernising the country. Therefore, the maritime trade development strategy of both India and Vietnam share similar starting points. Both countries have recognised the role of sea trade and the need for ensuring maritime security as an important priority of the two nations. The similarity in national development strategy of the two governments is the foundation for an increasingly good and close cooperation between the two countries and people in the area of maritime security.

Secondly, Vietnam has many policies that are suitable for the Indian maritime security requirements. In the development of marine trade, there are two sides which can become threats including traditional security and non-traditional security and therefore the focus of attention by the Indian government and other countries. In this paper, the authors emphasised non-traditional maritime security. Non-traditional maritime security includes the risk of conflicts and damage to maritime trade from the following activities at sea such as piracy, terrorism, weapons proliferation, drug trafficking, human trafficking, ship accidents and other illicit activities. Since 2007, the Indian Navy Force has stepped up their maritime security protection strategy when announcing their freedom of navigation strategy. This was affirmed by India's Ministry of Defence (Navy) (2015):

The rise in sources, types and intensity of threats, with some blurring of traditional and non-traditional lines, requires a seamless and holistic approach towards maritime security. In order to provide 'freedom to use the seas' for India's national interests, it is necessary to ensure that the seas remain secure.

As a result, the Indian government has begun to invest in its navy force to protect free trade at sea for their merchants. The determination to ensure maritime security is confirmed in the report, “Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy” which has affirmed the central mission of the Indian Navy that:

- *The safety and security of seaborne trade and energy routes, especially in the IOR, considering the effect on global economies and India’s national interests;*
- *The importance of maintaining freedom of navigation and strengthening the international legal regime at sea, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), for all-round benefit; and*
- *The considerable scope and value in undertaking cooperation and coordination between various navies, to counter common threats at sea (India’s Ministry of Defence Navy, 2015).*

This report highlighted the Indian government’s determination to focus on maritime security. The development of India’s marine trade is gradually shifting its focus to the Asia-Pacific with some large and dynamic economies such as China, Japan, and South Korea. The maritime seaway goes through Southeast Asia (including Vietnam) which is important to India because:

The Straits of Malacca and Singapore link the Indian Ocean to the South China Sea and Pacific Ocean. Providing the shortest sea route from the Persian Gulf to East Asia/West Pacific regions, it is a strategic choke point in the IOR. A dense shipping zone, more than 70,000 ships transit it each year (India’s Ministry of Defence Navy, 2015).

Sailing through the Malacca Straits is the shortest route connecting the Indian Ocean (India) with the Pacific Ocean. This is where Vietnam has an important geostrategic position on this maritime route; therefore, the cooperation with Vietnam to ensure India’s maritime security is necessary.

Vietnam’s maritime economic sector has made significant progress, the output value of its shipping industry, seaport services and

shipbuilding has continuously increased, at an increasing rate of 22 percent per year from 2007 to 2010 and at 13 percent per year from 2011 to 2015. However, the overall contribution of the maritime economy to Vietnam's GDP is relatively small as it decreased from 1.05 percent in 2010 to 0.98 percent in 2015, and decreased further to 0.97 percent in 2017 (Ministry of Transport, 2019). Its fleet of domestic ships, accounted till end of November 2017, had a total tonnage of about 7.8 million tons, ranked 4th in ASEAN and 30th in the world. The output of goods throughout the seaport system has steadily increased over the years from 427.3 million tons in 2015 to 511.6 million tons in 2017. After 10 years of implementing the marine strategy, the whole industry has made huge efforts to invest in its infrastructure development and logistics services, ensuring the demand for goods circulation by seaway with a growth rate of goods from 10 percent to 20 percent. Many of its seaports are able to receive ships of 200,000 tons (Vietnam Maritime Company, 2019). Although Vietnam's success in maritime trade come together with the demand for ensuring maritime security, Vietnam also needs a peaceful, secure and cooperative environment for the development of marine trade. Therefore, in 2016, the Prime Minister of Vietnam promulgated the decree 170/2016/ND-CP, dated December 27th 2016. The contents of this decree include: the announcement, reception, processing and transmission of maritime security information. Thereby, "*The Maritime Security Information Center is the organisation with the function to receive, process and transmit maritime security information that follows with the Decree 170/2016, the International Code of ships, port and other relevant regulations*" (Government of Vietnam, 2016). The establishment of the Maritime Security Information Center and the Vietnam Maritime Code in 2015 formed the legal basis for Vietnam, to gradually improve its maritime security policy system, and integrate into the world maritime security.

For India, its confidence in Vietnam has grown even stronger when the Law of Maritime Security was announced in 2015. According to Article 107, that was presented in Vietnam's assembly in 2015, the broadcast of maritime security information include:

[1] Maritime security information is the information about action of unlawfully deterring a ship's voyage or the danger that happened or may occur to the security of ship incident.

[2] When ships' action in the Vietnam seaport's area, sea area encounter maritime security problems, they must transmit the security signals following regulations.

[3] Sea ships, when receiving maritime security information from others, have the obligation to transmit information to the responsible agencies or organisations of that country.

[4] The receiving maritime security information agency is responsible for operating 24 hours a day to solve information and transmit maritime security information directly to relevant agencies.

[5] The government set up the publication, receiving, processing and transmitting of maritime security information (Vietnam's Assembly, 2015).

The clear regulations, timely and suitable maritime security law are guarantees to attract and establish diplomatic relations with other countries, including India. Furthermore, the 8th Conference of the Executive Committee of the Communist Party (Course XII) in October 2018 approved the strategy for sustainable development of Vietnam's marine economy up to 2030, together with a vision to 2045 with the goal to gradually develop Vietnam to become a strong sea nation—to prosper from the sea, base on the sea and seaward. The success of Vietnam's marine economic development policy, in recent years, has been the foundation to establish cooperation with other countries. India has always appreciated Vietnam's efforts, more clearly, the then Indian Ambassador in Vietnam, Pranay Verma believed that:

The “Action East Policy” is one of our fundamental visions in interacting with our extended neighborhood to the East of India. Vietnam is emerging standing out in that vision. Vietnam is a key pillar of India's Action to East Policy on all three pillars that can be known as the three Cs including with Commerce, Connectivity and Culture. The Indo-Pacific vision is for a free zone, an open-heart, peace, prosperity and above all, is for an integration, order region based on rules and respect for the sovereignty of the country (Anh Huyen, 2020).

It can be seen that “the timely adaptation” of Vietnam before the changes of the world and regional situation is a decisive condition,

promoting the relation with India is closer. Vietnam is gradually becoming a leading factor in India's maritime security policy in the Asia-Pacific.

Thirdly, Vietnam is an important partner of India in creating a balance to India's maritime power in comparison with China in the Asia-Pacific. The development of India has always been met with competition (both traditional and non-traditional) from China. Many researchers and policymakers opined that India's role needs to be more balanced against the rise of China and that the maritime space must be expanded as Singh (2017) asserted:

Indian analysts stress the importance of the Eastern Indian Ocean as a bridge linking together the littoral sub-regions of Asia, a sharp reminder to regional powers that the burdens of development and security in the Indian Ocean must be shared equally [...]. Their vision includes a concert of open, liberal, and like-minded democracies (viz. the United States, India, Australia, and Japan) to take the lead in shaping the economic and security architecture of the region.

Additionally, according to a 2013 Lowy Institute poll, Pan (2014) claimed that:

83 percent of Indians view China as a threat because of the Chinese strategy of containing India and squeezing its traditional strategic space in the region. In order to put this anxiety in perspective and given the long-standing mistrust between India and China, a strategic logic is not far below the surface.

Moreover, Indian analysts such as Gurpreet Khurana and Raja Mohan see an Indo-Pacific "rivalry arc" between India and China. With India's sea lines of communication apparently at the mercy of the Chinese, they call for projecting India's power into the Pacific to match China's growing presence in the Indian Ocean (Pan, 2014). In the middle of that "circle", Vietnam is in the centre of "the connecting line" between India and China at sea. In addition, Vietnam is also facing certain challenges from Beijing as the Vietnamese government claimed in the Resolution 09-NQ/TW that "*This strategy, however,*

faces challenges from China. Since 2007, China has warned foreign oil and gas companies to cease their joint exploration activities with Vietnam or risk their business relations with China” (Ton, 2018, p. 7). Subsequently, the government claimed that “As the South China Sea dispute intensifies, Vietnam must enhance defence diplomacy to attract international support, while also investing in maritime forces that can effectively safeguard national sovereignty” (Ton, 2018, p. 8). The continuous actions of China in the South China Sea which is in the territorial sea of Vietnam have caused many concerns to Vietnam and other countries in the world. According to Singh (2016), many researchers claimed that:

China, on the other hand, launched its ‘One Belt and One Road’ initiative in October 2013, connecting the Asia-Pacific economic circle with the European economic circle, with the aim of exhorting its centrality in the global trade. Also, India, in 2014 introduced its ‘Act East’ policy which is an extrapolation of its ‘Look East’ policy of the 1990s and demarcated South-East India Ocean sea-routes to the Pacific Ocean, South and East China Seas and Western Pacific Ocean and their littoral as an area of its maritime interest.

Beijing’s actions have threatened the maritime security of other countries in general and India in particular at sea. Therefore, New Delhi needs to further strengthen cooperation with Vietnam to create a “balance” in power and influence in the South China Sea.

The important target of India’s maritime policy in the Pacific is to establish strategic links with other countries in this area as stated by Drishti (2020) that, “In order to secure sea lanes of communication, enhancing interoperability at sea, intelligence-sharing and maintaining freedom of navigation, India should work together with like-minded nations.” With reference to this target, Vietnam shares a “similar view” with India. The Vietnam government has clearly defined that:

Exploit all resources for socio-economic development, protect the marine environment in the spirit of proactively, do hard opening, bring into play fully and effectively the resources inside; take advantage of international cooperation, strongly attract the external resources on

the principles of equality, mutual benefit, firmly defend the country's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. (Quynh, 2015)

Vietnam has always maintained the spirit of proactive cooperation with other countries in the spirit of respect for each other's independence, sovereignty and national profit. The similarity of strategic goals of maritime security in protection has motivated Vietnam and India to have more positive moves and closer cooperation.

On 26th November 2012, at the meeting with the admiral Devendra Kumar Joshi the then commander of the Indian Navy in Hanoi, the then minister of National Defence of Vietnam – General Phung Quang Thanh – affirmed that *“the two countries have many similarities and common strategies, always supporting each other both on the bilateral basis as well as in international and regional forums”* (VOV5, November 26, 2012). Since then, the activities of maritime security cooperation between India and Vietnam have increased year by year. For more details, according to India's Ministry of Defence (Navy) (2015), the New Delhi's policy is *“An expansion in maritime operational engagements, with increased number and complexity of exercises with foreign navies, coordinated mechanisms for maritime security operations, and enhanced training, technical and hydrographic cooperation with friendly maritime forces”*.

Since the 1990s, India has increased naval actions in Southeast Asia as indicated in Pan's (2014) research that *“India has expanded its joint naval exercises with all South-East Asian countries and extended its military presence in the Western Pacific through multilateral exercises with the US, Japanese, Australian and Singaporean navies”*. This presence is to increase the Indian influence as well as form a counter balance to China in the South China Sea.

For Vietnam, the naval activities of the two countries are also increasingly practical and deeper. On 1st of January 2013, the Indian naval ship named Sudarshini docked at Tien Sa port for a friendship tour to Danang City. Subsequently, from 4th to 8th of June 2013, four Indian warships carrying 1,200 officers and crew visited Danang. This was the largest visit by the Indian Navy to Danang, Vietnam. In Danang, Admiral Ajit Kumar, Commander of the Eastern Fleet of the Indian Navy said that *“The most important purpose of this visit to*

Danang city is to further strengthen the relationship between the navy forces of Vietnam and India” (VOV5, 2013, June 4). In the following years, visits between the Indian and Vietnamese naval forces have become more frequent. Since 2015, aside from visits, maritime security cooperation between the two countries has increased through training agreements and training for the Vietnamese navy.

On 2nd November 2015, more than 300 officers and crew on the Indian Navy ship, INS Sahyadri arrived at Tien Sa port, on a visit to Danang city. The navies of the two countries had a bilateral rehearsal for rescue exercises at sea including volleyball matches with the 3rd Naval Command of Vietnam. Colonel Kunal Raj Kumar, commander of the Indian Navy ship said that:

India and Vietnam have a long standing, special economic and cultural relationship. The cooperation and friendly relationship between the Vietnam Navy and the Indian Navy have developed in recent years. It was reflected in training courses, especially high-level visits between the two countries. The visit of the Indian Navy ship to Danang is aimed to strengthen the cooperation relationship between Vietnam and India (VOV5, 2015, November 2).

The coordinated activities between the Indian navy and Vietnamese navy force were intended to improve combat capabilities, search and rescue capabilities of the Vietnamese navy which are meaningful to the two nations. In its strategy of developing maritime trade, the Indian government has focused on ensuring the safety of Indian traders at sea, in which, search and rescue operations are priority. Therefore, a well-trained Vietnamese navy will be able support Indian merchant ships at sea when the ships encounter difficulties. In turn, the Vietnamese navy has access to science and technology through cooperation in training with India which has contributed to strengthen the Vietnamese navy. This relationship, has clearly brought mutual benefit which has steered the relationship between the two nations to new heights. This was reflected in the statement by the then Indian President Pranab Mukherjee in Ho Chi Minh City on 15th September 2014, *“to protect the common profits including peace and prosperity, India and Vietnam must stand together... India will always be a trusted and loyal friend of Vietnam”* (Le, 2019).

Thus, the cooperation in maritime defence and security between Vietnam and India will bring benefit to the two countries. This cooperation also aims to address China's aggressive actions in the South China Sea. Based on some analytical reports, Drishti (2020) mentioned that:

Though China has shown aggressive posture in the South China Sea and as well as the Indian Ocean, it has been anxious about its vulnerability at sea – or what is referred to as the Malacca dilemma. Taking this in cognizance, India should develop sea-denial capability mainly at choke points in Indian Ocean such as the Strait of Hormuz, Bab-el-Mandeb, and Strait of Malacca.

In the early years of the 21st century, although China declared that it was “growing peace” Beijing's activities in the South China Sea had caused huge concern to neighbouring nations which perceived the activities as challenges to their maritime security. Therefore, the close association of India with Vietnam will bring a more balanced relationship with China in the South China Sea.

Fourthly, Vietnam is still a reliable and comprehensive strategic partner in ensuring maritime security for India in the Indo-Pacific. In 2007, India and Vietnam officially announced the establishment of its “strategic partnership”. Relations between the two nations have grown gradually deeper with comprehensive cooperation in all fields including economics, politics, and maritime security. Therefore, on September 2016, the leaders of both countries decided to upgrade their bilateral relationship to a “comprehensive strategic partnership”. This event indicated that the relationship between Vietnam and India has grown deeper, more reliable, and effective. This good relationship has been concretised in many fields especially in political pillars, defence, security, economy, trade, investment, culture, science and technology, education and training, and people exchange relations.

In the field of maritime security, from 3rd to 8th of October 2017, the then Deputy Minister of Defence, Admiral Sunil Lamba who is Chairman of the Chief of Staff and also the Commander of the Indian Navy made an official friendship visit to Vietnam. The two countries agreed in the coming times, to continue effective deployment in the fields of cooperation under the signed agreements, including the “Declaration

on the Joint Vision on Defence Relations between Vietnam and India in the 2015–2020 period”. The two armies need to maintain and strengthen the exchange of delegations at all levels, focusing on the exchange of young officers between the two armies. The two nations have continued to promote the Defence Policy Dialogue mechanism at the Deputy Minister level, increasing cooperation in the field of training and defence industry. Regarding cooperation between the military and service forces, “*both countries need to continue to exchange their needs and capabilities to offer practical cooperation content*” (VOV5, 2017, October 3). It is evident that India has always been interested in the field of defence and maritime security. Vietnam has become “a reliable ally” with India in ensuring the freedom of maritime trade, and maritime security in the South China Sea, securing a seaway of maritime trade connecting the Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean.

On 20th November 2018, during the Plenary Session of the National Assembly of Vietnam, the then President of India, Ram Nath Kovind affirmed that “*Vietnam is very important to India’s policy of Action East. Outside of the region, India and Vietnam have continued the commitment of working together in the emerging risk fields such as cybersecurity and in multilateral meetings*” and he wished that the strength of relations in business and the strong connection between both countries would be the role of this process. The two countries have grown to become dynamic economies, with Vietnam having impressive export-driven growth and India becoming one of the fastest growing major economies in the world. In his response, the Chairman of the National Assembly of Vietnam affirmed that:

The National Assembly of Vietnam would do its best to cooperate with the Indian Parliament to contribute in reinforcing and promoting the friendship between the two countries for the mutual benefit of the two peoples; for peace, prosperity, cooperation and development of the area and the world (VOV5, 2018, November 20).

It is apparent that the political stability and strong economic development have made Vietnam become a reliable partner with other countries in the world including India. On 21st December 2020, in the Vietnam–India online conference, the then Prime Minister of Vietnam, Nguyen Xuan Phuc and the Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi

approved the “Declaration of Joint Vision Vietnam – India on Peace, Prosperity and People”. Thereby reaffirming the desire to further promote a comprehensive strategic partnership, and cooperation in the defence sector as reported in VOV5 (2020, December 5) that “*Both countries reaffirmed the importance of maintaining peace, stability, security and free zone of navigation and aviation in the South China Sea, and peaceful settlement of disputes in accordance with international law*”. Consequently, Vietnam and India both share a common desire for a peaceful, stable development for the two countries, and two peoples to cooperate and successfully implement the strategy of marine economic development, and ensuring maritime security for the two nations.

Finally, the economic development and political stability have made Vietnam become the most important partner in India’s maritime security policy. According to the World Bank, in 2020 Vietnam’s economy would grow at 2.8 percent and the International Monetary Fund was forecasted to be 2.4 percent. Vietnam is one of the four economies in the world that enjoy growth in GDP per capita. It is one of many countries with the highest growth rates in the world and partly attributed to its efforts and durable defence during the Covid-19 pandemic. Vietnam’s GDP scale increased by about 1.4 times compared to 2015. According to the International Monetary Fund, in 2020 Vietnam could become the 4th ranked economy in ASEAN; GDP per capita in 2020 is estimated around 2,750 USD. At the same time, Vietnam has continued to maintain and consolidate a stable macroeconomy in the context of strong regional and world economic situation (Phong, 2020). The stability and high economic development of Vietnam would attract Indian investors to the country. Mahesh Desai, Chairman of the Export Promotion Council of the Indian mechanical industry said that “*Vietnam is one of the key markets in India’s East Policy with its high economic growth, dynamic development, diverse fields and an attractive place for foreign investors*” (VOV5, 2020 September 23). It is therefore both India’s role for Vietnam and Vietnam’s role for India, in trade, which has improved significantly.

Since Vietnam and India signed the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement in 2016, the two countries have high-grade exchange visits every year. The economic – trade cooperation between Vietnam and India, in recent years, has seen remarkable development.

India is one of the 12 largest trading partners of Vietnam. The bilateral trade between Vietnam and India, in the fiscal year 2017 – 2018, was estimated at USD 12.83 billion, up to 26.96 percent over the previous year. India's exports to Vietnam, estimated at USD 7.81 billion, up to 15.13 percent, while India's imports reached more than USD 5 billion, up to 51.14 percent. In the first ten months of 2018, the two-way turnover between India and Vietnam, estimated at USD 9.2 billion, up to 47 percent (Anh Huyen, 2018). Since December 2020, India is currently one of the ten important trading partners of Vietnam, and Vietnam is the 4th largest trading partner of India in ASEAN. The two-way trade turnover has increased more than ten times since the establishment of a strategic partnership in 2007, up to more than USD11 billion in 2019, in which Vietnam's exports to India was estimated at USD6.6 billion (VOV5, 2020 December 19) [...]. The then Vietnamese Ambassador in India, Pham Sanh Chau said that:

India nowadays is a very important partner of Vietnam, one of three comprehensive strategic partners of Vietnam. India is also a large tourism and export market that we have not fully exploited. With a population of 1.4 billion people, India is a large country, in the history of relations with Vietnam, there is no doubt or blemish. Therefore, there is very high political trust and trustworthiness, and I think the potential for cooperation between the two countries is still very great (Anh Huyen, 2018).

Through mutual trust and seeing each other's roles, are factors to promote better relations between India and Vietnam in the future. Furthermore, in the future, Vietnam will play an increasingly important role in the maritime security policy of India in the Asia-Pacific.

CONCLUSION

Maritime security is one of the most important fields for the national development strategy of many countries in the world including the USA, China, India, and Vietnam. Therefore, ensuring maritime security is an important requirement for these countries. With similar long coastal and favourable geostrategic position to develop maritime trade, in recent years, India and Vietnam have developed strategies in maritime economic development and to ensure maritime security. The development of the India and Vietnam relationship has grown from

strength to strength and has resulted in many important achievements. Its cooperation has brought many mutual benefits for the development of the two countries. Thus, Vietnam has become a comprehensive and reliable partner to India. More importantly, Vietnam is and will continue to play a central role in India's maritime security policy in the Asia-Pacific and in the future.

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