

Vietnam strategic framework

World situations have changed rapidly; most countries face complicated and uncertain problems. The 21st century world situation has created new opportunities and challenges for Vietnam. The new opportunities also include the new way in which the rest of region is looking at Vietnam from the different aspect. The new challenges relate to the dilemmas facing the Vietnamese leadership in balancing the country's security interests with its economic goals in its economic policy of 'Doi Moi' (renovation). During the process of economic goal, Vietnam has taken benefits and at the same time been faced with numerous challenges. The New Strategic Framework's comprehensive security of Vietnam needs more understanding of the new security threats Vietnam faces in the 21st century.

Part 1: the assessment of strategic environments.

Vietnam's outlook must focus on both internal stability and development, and the external factors that might impact on the development in other ways challenge Vietnam's interest. Also non-traditional threats include those related to environmental issues, the cross-border movement of people, health issues and terrorism. Threats to Vietnam's national interest and security may come from external and internal challenges or a combination of both.

A. Challenges

1. Internal issues

The Challenges from Economic growth for Vietnam are very important considerations. Vietnam has undergone a transition from a communist-central plan to a market-oriented economy. Vietnam's economy has been in transition from a market economy, based primarily on agriculture, to become an industrial country by 2010. The renovation process known as Doi Moi has paved the way for Vietnam's economic developments to promote Vietnam to become an industrialized and modernized country. Indeed, it has led to social disorder and instability.

1.1 Poverty has been exacerbated by the rapid economy. While new opportunities and economic benefits for many Vietnamese people have improved, there is an increasing gap between the rich and the poor, and between the rural and urban population.

1.2 The global problems are one of the challenges for Vietnam. The HIV/AIDS is now generalized in border provinces and to be one of the greatest human challenges for Vietnam. The incidence of HIV is increasing throughout Vietnam. It is estimated by the WHO that the number of HIV/AIDS infected people at 71,500 by mid 2030.

1.3 The economic growth needs foreign investment. Due to the fact that the income to support the Vietnam economy is mainly from foreign investment, Vietnam must expand its markets in order to reach economic goals. However, when the economy relies mainly on outside investment, the long-term economy may be unstable.

2. Regional issues

2.1 Territory dispute with Cambodia

Apart from long periods of fluctuated relationships between Vietnam and Cambodia in relation of conflict and political ties, the problem of the Vietnamese minorities in the Central Highlands, which was the subject of widespread international criticism in 2001, may continue to pose difficulties for the Vietnam and Cambodia. (Jane's defence, 2005)

The repression of ethnic minority protests in the Central Highlands has caused many Montagnards to escape across the border into Cambodia, This led to occasional instability in relations between the two states. Vietnam has insisted that the Montagnards are all "bandits and criminals" and should be sent back to Vietnam, but many refugees fear persecution if they are sent back. On April 10, 2004 in the Central Highlands 150,000 Degars (Montagnards) arrived in the city of Buon Ma Thuot to stage peaceful demonstrations to call on the Vietnamese authorities and the international community for the respect of their fundamental rights.

2.2 Territory dispute with regional countries over Spratly Islands

Another issue that might increase regional instability is the dispute over the South China Sea - Spratly Islands. This is perhaps the most complex multilateral territorial dispute in the South China Sea *as* the dispute directly involves China and four ASEAN member countries. It affects the interests of many regional countries in terms of sea lane market and international relationships.

2.3 The impact of the developments on the upper Mekong River

There are many developments on the Mekong River- the international river. It affects all the lower countries and Vietnamese people who live and use the water for their daily life.

2.4 The increasing of transnational Crime

One of the most major increasing threats is the transnational Crime and others non-traditional threats, particularly drug trafficking. This is a result of drug traffickers change their routes from Myanmar- Thailand – Laos –Cambodia-Vietnam to destination countries. (Royal Thai Army intelligence's report, 2005)

3. External issues: relationship with the major powers

From the geopolitical aspect, Vietnam is in a very important location. However, Vietnam faces both advantages and disadvantages. In this section, I should describe the challenges for Vietnam in the context of relationships between Vietnam and the most major powers: China, the US and India.

3.1 China

It is clear that China has increased its diplomatic, cultural and economic influence in Southeast Asia over the past decades. Also, at the same time, because of Vietnam's economic goals, China has become an important market of the Vietnamese economy. Apart from economic opportunities, Vietnam has several challenges with China.

The first challenge for Vietnam in the relationships with China is the dispute over the Spratly and Paracel Islands. This flashpoint is still one of the main areas for potential world conflict, which need to be considered as a global issue. It is inevitable that both sides need to make decisions based on national interests.

Secondly, the influence of China over Cambodia is another question for Vietnam because Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Sen has long-standing formal and informal ties with Vietnam, and Cambodia has provided natural resources to Vietnam for two decades. If China dominates Cambodia in order to access to its resources, it would mean that Vietnam may lose resources for its economy.

3.2 The US

In general, a Vietnam-U.S. relation has continued to be strengthened and developed. The two sides exchanged a number of high-level visits by delegations from the Governments and private sectors. The relations between them were expanded in many fields, especially economy and trade relations, which is broadened and deepened.

It is well known that the one of the most important US foreign policies is human right policy; Vietnam is one of the Human Right Watch on the US lists on the ethnic group's problem at the Central Highland. Vietnam may face this problem obstructing the investment from the US. Also the US may raise this problem to negotiate Vietnam in some ways.

3.3 India

Regarding South Asia, Vietnam reached agreements on framework of cooperation with India, one of the most important countries. The multi-faceted cooperation between Vietnam and India continued to be maintained. Vietnam remains an important ally to India, which views Vietnamese support as a useful the balance of power of growing Chinese influence in Asia.

B. Opportunities

Vietnam is facing with a different degree of challenge and opportunities. The country possesses the great advantage of political and social stability. Also, a stable political environment with assured security and social safety facilitate investment attraction and development.

The United States, India and China obviously are very important markets and sources investment for Vietnam. Moreover, in the geopolitical aspect, the three countries may try to dominance this region by increasing economic cooperation over past five-year. Therefore, Vietnam may take these opportunities to increase the number of import and export products in order to support its economic requirements. Clearly, one of the opportunities is the support by the US in negotiations over Vietnam's entries to the World Trade Organization (WTO). Interestingly, the EU and India still need to have more economic cooperation with Vietnam as the new market.

ASEAN also plays the major role on the international communities not only security concerns but also economic aspect. Vietnam gains window opportunities from ASEAN to become one of mechanism to reduce the tension with China under ARF cooperation. In March, 2005, China, Philippines, and Vietnam sign landmark agreement to conduct joint prospecting for oil and gas in South China Sea. It is a good signal for regional security that those countries try to solve such a problem.

C. Priority from challenges and why they are important

The greatest threat to Vietnam comes from its socio-economic problems. The rapid economic growth has led Vietnam to ignore poverty, poor education and health support. This is because the Vietnamese government is concentrating on its economy only. This section should prioritize Vietnam Challenges and discuss the reason why they are important. Then, it should also focus on the timeframe for solutions.

Challenges in the short terms solutions (5 years)

- Poverty directly influences to Vietnam society both the urban and rural areas. In households which are poor, unemployed, uneducated, the average number of children is often higher than that of other types of households. It can be said that large gap between the rich and poor is both the reason for and the consequence of poverty faced by poor households in the rural area.
- The HIV/AIDS epidemic is indeed an urgent health and social issue having damaging effects on the health of the people, the future of the socio-economic development of the country, health and life of the population. The increasing HIV infection rate is a serious threat to the Vietnamese economy. Beside costs for prevention and treatment, there are a lot of other expenses such as those for funerals, for care of orphans and helpless elders. Also, it may deter the foreign investments as some companies regard this as the major concern of their employees.
- The Central highlands and Southwest have also emerged as a major challenge because local authorities' management has not been close enough and because levels of education remain low. This problem cause social disorder and to undermine national security and the great national solidarity.

Challenges in the medium terms solutions (5-10 years)

- There are three challenges to Vietnam in the medium terms solutions: territories dispute with China, drug trafficking and impacts of the developments on the upper Mekong

Challenges in the long terms solutions (10-20 years)

- Clearly, the economic growth needs foreign investments, but Vietnam must look forward to make its self reliance in the future in order to avoid too greater dependence on the uncontrollable factors.

Part 2: Policy options and approach

A strong economy in Vietnam is one and the same with a nation's internal stability and its ability to protect itself from both internal and external threat. Peace, co-operation and developments are becoming an increasing trend to improve Vietnamese quality of life. The overlapped challenge of defence policy and economic instability is the most important issue in the fight against poverty, disease, social and environmental changes.

Vietnam's strategic goal: maintaining Vietnam's economy stability

Apart from the basic economic requirements, such as expanding external economic relations, widening and diversifying markets and taking advantage of capital, managerial experience and advanced technology for national industrialisation and modernisation, Vietnam must reach the specific objectives in order to achieve the strategic goal. They are five specific tasks:

1. Improve quality of life of the Vietnamese people

- **Reduce the poverty**

It is well known that the poverty is one of the most obstructing factors to Vietnam's developments. In order to increase Vietnamese economic productivity, Vietnam needs to solve the poverty problems both in the urban and rural areas. The success with social matters of poverty reduction needs to improve health and education system with intensive administrative policy. It is also suggested that economic restructuring and poverty reduction in mountainous ethnic minority-inhabited areas should be accelerated, especially in border communities.

Promoting education and public awareness are essential to reducing the level of poverty as well.

- **Reduce risk of heath from serious disease**

Vietnam has run campaign to encourage individuals, families and the whole society to be aware of the danger of HIV/AIDS and to promote the role of Vietnam societies where

HIV/AIDS has spread widely. Such activities are considered to help prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS.

This is need to intensify and expand the provision of basic social services, especially primary health care, basic education and prevention and control of HIV/AIDS and other communicable diseases to fight child poverty in particular and rural poverty in general.

2. Maintain relationships with countries and organizations and to maintain peace and stability in the region

Maintaining relationships, peace and stability in the region have included the multilateral security processes embodied in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the broader ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and the stress on alliance relations both formally and informally with counties outside the region.

- **Strengthen with countries and organizations**

The regional and international environment of peace, cooperation and integration are other positive trends in providing favourable conditions for Vietnam to build on its internal developments.

Vietnam should maintain and develop relations of friendships, cooperation and joint development with other countries. This is because strengthening relationships is vital to national security and future economic well being.

Vietnam should expand bilateral and multilateral cooperation with countries and territories in both economic and political cooperation both international and regional organizations on the basis of respect for principles of International Law and the United Nations Charter.

Next, to strengthen the mechanism for conflict prevention, the resolution at the regional, sub-regional and continental levels is also vital. Nowadays, the internal conflict attracts the world attentions. To avoid the intervention from some organizations, Vietnam should try not to break in international rules, particularly on Human rights.

- **Maintain peace and stability in the region**

Peace and stability are vital factors for economic development and are also factors of great importance to the creation of a favorable environment for promoting economic cooperation and integration. However, at present there still exist potential threats to peace and

stability in Southeast Asia. Conflicting national interests, occasional tensions on certain political and economic issues, and the different approaches to economic development strategies among regional countries, need to be carefully, peacefully and patiently addressed., Vietnam, in this regard of the ASEAN member countries, should be more involved in contributing to the healthy relationships and turning Southeast Asia into a zone of peace, stability and prosperity.

- **Combat transnational crime**

Since the September 11th event, Viet Nam has joined other countries in combating terrorism on the bilateral and multilateral basis to fight against terrorism, a major threat on national security and stability. However, Vietnam should be aware of the fact that the world today is confronted with various global issues which cannot be resolved by countries individually, Vietnam should cooperate closely with other countries and regional and international organizations to address common challenges the transnational crimes such as drug trafficking and arm smuggling.

3. Pursued national development

Vietnam should focus on the rural, remote, mountainous and underserved areas so as to give all the people the equally opportunities to access the nation developments and all resources and use them effectively for national development.

Vietnam's patriotism and nationalism should increase great spiritual and moral strength. It should encourage Vietnamese people to recall their history and recognise the need for civilians to support the Government and to be a part of the national development policy.

4. Overcome tension arising from internal interest and instability of national border

The national defense security should need to have the intensive surveillance of border control, both on land and at sea in order to reduce illegal immigration, the trafficking of women and children, the smuggling of goods, and counter drug-related and trans-national crime and international terrorists which have impact to socio-economic development planing of economic in rural area. These measures will promote security in the border areas.

Importantly, to stabilize and improve living standards of ethnic minority people, particularly in the Central Highlands, Vietnam should continue implementing the socio-

economic development program for especially difficult communes in order to ensure implementation of land policy for these groups and other ethnic minority people appropriately. It should reduce the human right in line with the international organizations expectation. Vietnam should make efforts to support and improve the material lives of ethnic minority people. Nowadays, the Government's programme for socio-economic development in mountainous areas is recording good results. Projects and programmes like this should continue to be carried out and expanded. One thing that should be done and improved is to give education to improve the supply of information to ethnic minority people.

In addition, Vietnam still need to maintain maritime surveillance which is one of the necessary controls of contiguous zone in order to see to its security and custom and fiscal interests and to ensure respect for its emigration and immigration regulations with in the Vietnamese territory or territorial sea.

Vietnam should provide the various abilities to response to violent incident and illegal activities quickly.

5. Manage international relationship to avoid domination by the major powers.

The influence of powerful states has also an important part to play in developing of the Vietnam in particular national contexts. The most difficult thing in the relationship with the US is how Vietnam can avoid the effect of U.S. strategy against the China. This is the main external issues of the major power factor that Vietnam needs to balance appropriately.

Part 3: Policy implementation

Nowadays, the needs for economic development are linked to new requirements for security. Political security and economic development are the simultaneous factors that strongly affect each country's defence. Dealing with unpredictability, complexity and uncertain situations are the biggest problem with which defence policy makers are faced. For economical and political strategic reasons, defence co-operation with other States is a high priority. The second priority is to prevent ant external problems along the land and sea border affected to the internal stability. At the same time, the Vietnam Armed forces have to play a minor role in supporting government development projects. Finally, the Vietnamese Armed Forces always consider maintaining peaceful environment, stability for socio-economic development, carrying

out industrialisation and modernisation in the direction of socialism to be vital to national interests.

Defend of Vietnam

Vietnam's military doctrine which is based on the main tenet of "all-people's national defence of Vietnam" in which all the people, not the armed forces alone, are participants in the great task of defending and protecting the country. Vietnam should prepare for self-defence against any action encroaching upon its territory, airspace and territorial waters, and national interests.

In general, Vietnam Armed force should secure and maintain the territorial integrity of Vietnam against external aggression and internal insurrection, guarantee security and stability for all its inhabitants and their property, conduct efficient and effective management systems and processes into defence and build an institutional framework that encourages collaboration between the differing security agencies, and enhance Civil - Military relations, building mutual understanding, trust and respect.

The defence implementation

- **Support the Government (all timeframe periods)**

Peace and stability have increased gradually. Vietnam must ensure that these are maintained by building the confidence not only of neighbouring states but also the international community. This should be achieved by having effective defence involvements in place and by recognizing that the prosperity that comes from foreign investment should only come when international confidence in Vietnam.

The Vietnam Armed forces should support the efforts in Government developments to enhance service delivery in rural communities in order to help develop the economy, improve people's living conditions and stabilise security in the border areas.

- **Military projects to support national policy and developments (short term)**

The Nation-Builder role for the military has traditionally been underpinned by a historical legacy which centralizes the importance of national military service in a contract between the state and its citizens. The use of the military in the Domestic Military Assistance role is controversial because of a strong tradition of the non-involvement of the regular armed forces in domestic politics.

One of the military implementations is to assist the civil authorities in the context of law enforcement, disaster relief and humanitarian aid, both nationally and internationally

Interestingly, to encourage the Vietnamese to be more nationalistic, all officers, soldiers, youth of Vietnamese People's Public Security should start the increasing of the awareness of history of Vietnam's Communist Party, Marxism - Leninism and Ho Chi Minh ideology in their family. This should also encourage the pride and belief of People's Public Security to the Vietnam's Communist Party, determine to build up and defend the Party and the socialist regime, build up the Party Committee of People's Public Security stainlessly and powerfully.

Deployment and expansion of the mobilized resources in the rural areas from the Armed forces should provide not only the medical treatments against AIDS but also education support from the military mobile team, for example.

- **Strengthen relationships (all timeframe periods)**

Vietnam gives priority to enhancing the relations with neighbouring countries Laos, Cambodia and China; countries in South East Asia, in the Asia-Pacific region and great nations. At the same time, Vietnam attaches great importance to the relations with traditional friends, new partners and international organisations.

More importantly, the efforts to develop the relations on the basis of mutual respect and equal co-operation and to strengthen mutual understanding through negotiations of dispute between the two countries are very important.

- Neighbouring countries

The Vietnam and neighboring counties need to exchange information on the operations of hostile forces, who want to undermine the two nations' friendship and solidarity and damage the security, social order, stability and development of the two countries. Vietnam should establish the joint committees along the border at all levels (local , Regional, and national), especially to localities sharing the border, by coordinating with other local authorities and solving the basic problems in order to prevent the local conflict to become the national conflict.

- ASEAN

Vietnam and the ASEAN member countries have many things in common regarding history, culture, society and economies. The objective is to activate ASEAN at all levels and all

aspects. Again, Vietnam will gain great opportunities from ASEAN as an important mechanism to reduce the tension with China under ARF cooperation.

- The Major powers

Vietnam should focus military measures to cooperate with the major powers at all levels, for example the relationships with the US by enhancing security in the contexts of counter-terrorism cooperation such as the joint exercise and exchange programs between two Armed forces. Meanwhile Vietnam should cooperate with China in contexts of naval joint training-exercises. Vietnam should focus on the exchange information technology with India because of its technological expertise. However, close military relationships with the major powers should not touch on the sensitive issues such as Taiwan and Cashmere.

- The UN: Peace operations participation

The UN peace operations, nowadays, play a major role in the international community by providing armed forces for the purpose of maintaining international peace and security; however, Vietnam has never sent military forces to participate in the UN peacekeeping operations. It is inevitable that these operations provide the great opportunities to the Vietnamese Armed forced to gain the good experience and show the capability of the Vietnamese Armed forced. In order to prepare both personnel and equipment, Vietnam should request the UN authorities to participate in the peacekeeping operation as observers. Also, Vietnam should invite some participating countries to share their experience such as preparation for participation in, and lessons learned from, peace support operations with Vietnam

- **Military Operations**

Regarding the limitation of the Vietnamese budget, the first priority should be placed on the land force border control units in order to support both the internal stability and strengthen relation with Cambodia and Laos. The number of Land force units should increase to ensure that the units along Vietnam border are able to prevent and conduct the military operation against unexpected situation on time.

Border controls (short term)

The budget of land force border control units may be allocated to increase the number of all vehicles types (Land, Air, water). The land force border control units should work closely with the local authorities such as customs and immigration units. The integration of the military

and local authorities is vital to fight against the external threats, such as smuggling, terrorism, piracy and drug trafficking and illegal cross-border activities, along the Vietnamese border.

New Naval vessels (short and medium term)

The Vietnam Navy should work closely with local authorities for regular and emergency reports on the maritime borders. The Vietnam Navy should have intensive patrols over maritime territories, especially in the Tonkin Gulf and the South China Sea, to make sure that border guards and marine troops are always ready and prepared to cope with any incidents.

The tension over the territory dispute in the South China Sea may reduce because of the increasing of cooperation between China and the prevention mechanism of ASEAN and ARF. Therefore, the increase of the numbers and modern ships is not the first priority. However, Vietnam still needs to improve and provide the naval capability in order to maintain the sea national interests in the medium term.

Air force (short and long term)

Air power is expensive to acquire, operate and maintain, so Vietnam should spread the cost of the fighter aircrafts over the next 10-years. This is because the arm race between the regions has declined rapidly. However, the patrol aircraft should be on the short term solution because they are very useful means to conduct reconnaissance operation in order to work closely with the land force border control units along the border and the naval Maritime surveillance in the Vietnamese sea border.

Conclusion

The 21st century presents both opportunities and challenges for Vietnam. The challenges of Vietnam require sustained commitments from both government and people to support the national developments. The most important challenge to rapid economic growth is the poverty. Therefore, Vietnam needs to improve all factors including the quality of life and reducing the gaps between the rural and urban areas in order to promote economic stability. Also, Vietnam has an objective to promote peace and self-defence by building an all-people national defence and the people's armed forces in order to maintain internal stability. In some circumstance, the Vietnam Armed forces have to play a minor role in supporting government development projects by using the military personnel and equipments to assist such urgent problems.