

Part I

**Analytical and
Historical Framework**

1

Introduction: The Making of Vietnam's Foreign Policy under *Doi Moi*

Le Hong Hiep

Since Vietnam launched its economic reforms under *Doi Moi* in 1986, foreign policy has been an essential tool for the ruling Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) to facilitate the implementation of its domestic agenda. As the CPV considers foreign policies as the extension of domestic ones, the Party has consistently sought to make use of external relations to enhance the country's national security and prosperity, and, ultimately, to strengthen the Party's rule. Understanding Vietnam's foreign policy is therefore necessary for one to fully appreciate the transformations that Vietnam has undergone since the adoption of *Doi Moi*.

This chapter serves as a background for readers to understand the making of Vietnam's contemporary foreign policy before examining its various aspects in subsequent chapters. The chapter first provides an overview of key drivers, objectives, principles, and actors involved in the making of Vietnam's foreign policy. It then assesses transformations in Vietnam's foreign policy under *Doi Moi* by examining major political and policy documents released by the CPV and how these changes have been translated into

actual developments of the country's foreign relations. Finally, the chapter discusses several contemporary foreign policy challenges that Vietnam is facing before providing a summary of the book's structure.

The Making of Vietnam's Foreign Policy

Unlike democratic countries where government changes may lead to foreign policy shifts, Vietnam's foreign policy is fairly stable thanks to the continuity maintained under the country's one-party system. As "the force leading the state and society", the CPV single-mindedly dictates Vietnam's foreign policy, and the country's foreign policy is therefore also the foreign policy of the Party. On the one hand, the stability and predictability in Vietnam's foreign policy lends it credibility, and thus the international community's confidence in its external commitments. On the other hand, the convergence of national interest with the CPV's interest in foreign policymaking renders it impossible to determine how much each weighs in the country's actual policies. In certain cases, the Party's ideological considerations and regime security concerns may interfere to dictate the country's foreign policy in ways that cannot be fully accounted for by national interests (see, for example, Co 2003; Hiep 2013a).

Balancing between national interests and regime interests therefore remains one of the major challenges for the CPV in terms of foreign policymaking. Developments in the country's foreign policy over the past three decades, however, show that pragmatic considerations of national interests have now become the most important factor shaping the country's foreign relations. To be more precise, while the CPV's ideological considerations still matter in certain cases, their importance in the making of Vietnam's foreign policy has somewhat declined. Such a shift started when *Doi Moi* was accelerated in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Palmujoki 1999; Thayer 1994a), and became more pronounced since the early 2000s. The evidence for this trend can be found, among others, in Vietnam's hardened stance towards China over the South China Sea disputes as well as its rapprochement with the United States in recent years.

At its twelfth national congress in 2016, the CPV stated that it sought "to carry out a foreign policy of independence, sovereignty, multilateralization and diversification of relations, proactive and active international integration; to firmly maintain a peaceful and stable environment, create favourable conditions for national construction and defence; and to elevate

Vietnam's status and prestige in the region and the world" (CPV 2015). According to the Party, such a foreign policy would be conducted on the fundamental principles of "international law, equality and mutual benefit", and "independence, autonomy, peace, cooperation and development". It should also be noted that Vietnam has long maintained the non-alignment principle in its foreign policy, which is embodied in the so-called "three no's principle". Specifically, Vietnam will not seek military alliances, will not allow foreign bases on its soil, and will not use relationship with one country against another (Ministry of Defence 2004, p. 5).

As the CPV dominates Vietnam's political system, the country's foreign policy is made at its discretion. Most important foreign policy decisions will be made collectively by the Party's Politburo. However, to enhance the legitimacy of its decisions, the Politburo may table certain important issues to the Party's Central Committee for discussion and decision through voting. For example, at its fourteenth plenum in January 2016, the CPV's Eleventh Central Committee voted to endorse Vietnam's ratification of the Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership Agreement (TPP). The collective making of Vietnam's foreign policy has both pros and cons. While the practice ensures a high level of consensus among the party leadership and the bureaucracy, and thus the prospect of smoother implementation of major decisions, it also obscures the accountability of decision makers, especially when such decisions lead to devastating outcomes. Following the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, for example, Vietnam missed several opportunities to normalize its relations with the United States due to its insistence on U.S. war reparations as a condition for normalization. The decision later proved to be a miscalculation, and the delayed normalization with Washington put Hanoi in a disadvantaged strategic position in dealing with Beijing as well as the Cambodian issue. However, no specific leader was held accountable for such an outcome.

The decisions made by the Party's Politburo and Central Committee, however, are normally based on inputs and policy recommendations provided by relevant ministries. Depending on the issue in question, one of the ministries will act as the coordinator in charge of collecting recommendations from other ministries to shape the Party's position on the issue. For example, issues related to foreign trade will normally be coordinated by the Ministry of Industry and Trade (MOIT), defence issues will be handled mainly by the Ministry of Defence (MOD), while the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) will take care of general

diplomatic relations with foreign countries as well as international organizations.

Among ministerial agencies involved in Vietnam's foreign policymaking and implementation, the MOFA is the key actor. The Ministry was established on 28 August 1945 with about 20 staffs (MOFA 2015, p. 33). By 2015, the Ministry had evolved into a full-fledged and modern agency of about 2,400 employees, most of whom are well-trained professional diplomats. Under the Ministry, there are currently 31 functional departments and a network of 71 embassies, 22 consulates-general, and 4 permanent missions to international organizations (MOFA 2015, p. 362). Unlike other ministries, the MOFA does not operate a vertical system of local units. However, it is in close contact with departments of external affairs of provinces and municipalities in certain functional areas, especially border, economic and protocol affairs.

In terms of policymaking procedure, the MOFA normally has to draw on consultations with various governmental organizations, such as other relevant ministries, intelligence agencies, the military, and the CPV's Commission of External Affairs.¹ Depending on the issues under consideration, the list of stakeholders may be expanded. For example, when it comes to South China Sea issues, the Ministry normally has to consult PetroVietnam and the Directorate of Fisheries, especially for technical inputs. In other cases, the Ministry's policy recommendations are based on in-house research and analysis done by its own experts, including those working at the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam, the training and research arm of the Ministry.

As the CPV exercises collective leadership, individual diplomats and policymakers tend not to play a prominent role in the making of Vietnam's foreign policy. However, in the earlier stages of the republic, due to the nascent nature of the state apparatus in general and the MOFA in particular, some individual leaders did play an essential role in the making and conduct of Vietnam's foreign policy. For example, President Ho Chi Minh, who also acted as the first foreign minister of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), was the architect of the republic's foreign policy in the period 1945–46 as well as during the First Indochina War. During the Second Indochina War, other individuals such as General Secretary Le Duan also played an important role in shaping the DRV's foreign policy (Nguyen 2012). After the wars, and especially since *Doi Moi* was adopted in 1986, the Party gradually returned to the collective and consensus-based foreign policymaking model, with individual leaders having a less decisive role.

As such, foreign ministers are just part of the Party's innermost foreign policymaking circle, although ministers who are also Politburo members normally wield greater influence on the policymaking than those who are not.

That said, when it comes to controversial or divisive issues, some researchers have argued that Vietnam's foreign policy are sometimes negotiated between two competing camps within the Party: conservatives and reformists (see, for example, Vuving 2004). As most important decisions are made collectively by the Politburo and the CPV Central Committee, it is difficult to identify and measure the relative weights of the two camps in the outcome of any particular policy debate. However, the labels "conservative" and "reformist" may still be useful to describe certain segments of high-ranking party officials who favour specific policies. Accordingly, conservatives tend to consider the preservation of regime security as the top foreign policy mandate. Therefore, they typically take a cautious approach to economic liberalization and favour stronger ties with China over Western countries. In contrast, reformists seek further economic liberalization and stronger relations with the West — although ideally at minimum risk to regime security. So far, while conservatives seem to be more influential when it comes to ideological and internal security matters, reformists seem to take the lead on the economic front, especially when the CPV is feeling the pressure for further reforms to buttress the country's economic performance — the vital basis of the Party's legitimacy (Hiep 2012). This explains some of Vietnam's recent bold foreign policy decisions, such as the embrace of the TPP which requires Vietnam to allow the establishment of independent labour unions.

The Evolution of Vietnam's Foreign Policy under *Doi Moi*

Since 1945, Vietnam's foreign policy has evolved through different phases corresponding to developments in the country's internal conditions. The country's foreign policy objectives are therefore shaped and implemented mainly in accordance with its domestic goals. For example, during the early years of the republic, its main diplomatic goals were to gain international recognition and to prevent France from re-colonizing the country. During the two wars against France and America, Vietnam's diplomacy focused on

mobilizing international support for its war efforts in order to unify the country and to re-establish peace. After 1975, Vietnam's diplomatic efforts turned to mobilizing international resources to facilitate the "building of socialism" across the whole country and to end its international isolation and economic embargo, especially after Vietnam sent its troops into Cambodia to unseat the Khmer Rouge regime in late 1978.

Since 1986 when the CPV adopted market-based economic reforms under the banner of *Doi Moi*, Vietnam's foreign policy has again taken a decisive turn as the Party sought to create favourable external conditions and to attract foreign resources for the cause of *Doi Moi*. Towards these ends, Vietnam had to undergo a major foreign policy overhaul, which required the Party to reform its foreign policy thinking. The exercise, however, proved to be a lengthy and onerous one.

Prior to the CPV's sixth national congress in 1986, the Party had long shaped its worldview through the ideological prism (see, for example, Palmujoki 1997, 1999; Porter 1980, 1990; Thayer 1984). Such ideological considerations remained prevalent in the foreign policy sections of the CPV's political reports to its sixth national congress in 1986. They were also translated into practical terms. For example, at the congress, the CPV stated that it considered Vietnam's relationship with the Soviet Union as the "cornerstone" in the country's foreign policy; strongly supported "the heroic struggle of the people and the working class in advanced capitalist countries", and expressed its deep sympathy and solidarity with national liberation movements in Africa, Latin America, and elsewhere (CPV 2006, pp. 434–39).

However, the CPV's ideology-based foreign policy proved to be detrimental to Vietnam's national interests. In the Cold War context, the CPV's emphasis on relations with the socialist bloc obviously narrowed Vietnam's relations with Western and non-socialist countries. Meanwhile, Vietnam's prolonged engagement in Cambodia since the late 1970s, which was based partly on the CPV's wish to establish a friendly communist state in Cambodia, turned out to be an economic and political suicide pill for Vietnam. The undertaking of the "international duty toward Cambodian people", as the CPV maintained, put excessive strains on Vietnam's war-torn economy. The policy also caused Vietnam to suffer from widespread international diplomatic isolation, which laid tremendous obstacles to Vietnam's efforts to revive its moribund economy.

Until the late 1980s, Vietnam remained heavily dependent on socialist countries, especially the Soviet Union, for its foreign economic exchanges.

By 1986 when *Doi Moi* was adopted, socialist countries accounted for 83.3 per cent and 67.1 per cent of Vietnam's imports and exports, respectively (Mya 1993, pp. 214–25). Such a heavy dependence on socialist countries for external trade not only limited Vietnam's ability to increase its total foreign trade turnover, but also exposed the country to serious risks that might disrupt its economic development. For example, in 1991 when the Soviet Union disintegrated, Vietnam's trade with the socialist bloc contracted dramatically, forcing Vietnam to increasingly look to non-socialist countries for substitute imports as well as export outlets.

Consequently, by the late 1980s, the CPV's top priority was to open up and diversify the country's external relations in order to take advantage of foreign resources, such as markets, capital and technologies, to boost economic growth. Toward these ends and despite its official rhetoric, by around its sixth national congress in 1986, the CPV began to step up efforts to retune the country's foreign policy towards the "diversification and multilateralization" of international relations beyond ideological considerations. On 9 July 1986, for example, the CPV Politburo passed Resolution No. 32 that sought to articulate changes to Vietnam's foreign policy. The top foreign policy objective identified by the Resolution was to "combine the strength of the nation with that of the time; take advantage of favourable international conditions to build socialism and defend the nation; and *proactively create a stable environment to focus on economic development* [emphasis added]" (Nam 2006, p. 26).

Despite these efforts, no major advance in Vietnam's foreign relations was made within the first few years after the CPV's sixth congress, mainly due to the adverse Cold War environment, and especially Vietnam's prolonged military engagement in Cambodia.

It was against this backdrop that in 1987, the CPV Politburo secretly adopted Resolution No. 2 to bring about more radical strategic adjustments to the country's security and foreign policy directions. Most importantly, the Resolution stated that Vietnam would completely withdraw its forces out of Cambodia and Laos, and to reduce the country's standing army to save resources for economic development efforts (Thayer 1994b, 1995). Soon after that, the CPV Politburo adopted Resolution No. 13 dated 20 May 1988 on "Tasks and Foreign Policy in the New Situation", which stressed that the top objectives of Vietnam's foreign policy would be to assist the stabilization of the political system and to facilitate the country's economic renovation. The

Resolution emphasized the policy of getting “more friends, fewer enemies” [*thêm bạn bớt thù*]. It also called for diversifying the country's foreign relations on the principle of national independence, equal sovereignty and mutual benefits, and set some specific foreign policy goals for the country, including the resolution of the Cambodian issue, diplomatic normalization with China and the United States, and improving ties with ASEAN, Japan and Western countries. Resolution No. 13 has therefore been considered as a landmark in the reform of the CPV's foreign policy thinking and a foundation for the country's later policy of diversifying and multilateralizing foreign relations (Hung 2006, p. 14; Nam 2006, p. 27).

At its seventh national congress in 1991, the CPV reaffirmed the overall foreign policy objective of maintaining peace and expanding its foreign relations to facilitate domestic development. It also declared that Vietnam would “diversify and multilateralize economic relations with all countries and economic organizations”. More importantly, it was at this congress that the CPV officially departed from its traditional ideology-based foreign policymaking in favour of a more pragmatic approach. Specifically, it officially stated that Vietnam wished “to be friend with all countries in the world community” (CPV 2010, p. 403) and sought “equal and mutually beneficial cooperation with all countries regardless of differences in socio-political regimes based on the principles of peaceful co-existence” (CPV 2010, p. 351). This pragmatic approach to foreign policymaking was maintained and further developed by the CPV in its subsequent congresses. For example, at its ninth congress (2001), the Party reaffirmed that “Vietnam is willing to be a friend and a reliable partner of countries in the world community, striving for peace, independence and development”. Such a slogan has since become the standard summary of Vietnam's foreign policy.

The pragmatic nature of Vietnam's new foreign policy under *Doi Moi* is also reflected in its economic focus. Accordingly, promoting international economic cooperation and integration has been identified as a key foreign policy task in various official documents of the Party. For example, in March 1989, the Party's Central Committee adopted a resolution in which the MOFA was demanded to decidedly shift its focus from political to politico-economic diplomacy. At its eighth congress in 1996, the Party embraced the policy of “building an open economy which is integrated with the region and the world” and “to accelerate the economic integration process”. Five years later, the CPV Politburo adopted Resolution

No. 7 dated 27 November 2001 on Vietnam's economic integration, outlining specific measures to facilitate the country's "active integration" into the global economy. At its eleventh congress in 2011, the CPV's foreign policy guideline expanded the scope of international integration to cover not only the economic realm but also integration in other fields. Two years later, the CPV Politburo adopted Resolution No. 22 to further detail the comprehensive international integration called for in the guideline. It also links Vietnam's international economic integration with its efforts to restructure the economy.

Under these foreign policy shifts, Vietnam's external relations expanded rapidly. By 2016, the country had established diplomatic relations with 180 countries and secured membership in most major international and regional institutions. Vietnam has also sought to deepen ties with important countries. By 2016, Vietnam had established "special partnership" with Laos, and strategic partnerships with Russia (2001), India (2007), China (2008), Japan, South Korea, Spain (2009), the United Kingdom (2010), Germany (2011), Italy, Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore, France (2013), Malaysia and the Philippines (2015).² It also entered into comprehensive partnership with South Africa (2004), Chile, Brazil, Venezuela (2007), Australia, New Zealand (2009), Argentina (2010), and the United States (2013).

Vietnam's policy of proactive international integration also helped to mobilize valuable external resources to turn the country into an economic success story. Between 1990 and 2014, Vietnam enjoyed an average annual growth rate of 6.8 per cent and reached the low middle income status in 2009. The poverty rate also declined significantly, from 58.1 per cent in 1993 to 11.1 per cent in 2012. Expanded foreign trade and foreign investment have played an essential role in this process. By 2014, for example, the total registered FDI stock into Vietnam amounted to US\$290.6 billion. In the same year, the country's two way trade turnover reached US\$298 billion, equivalent to 160 per cent of its GDP (GSO 2015). As such, Vietnam has become one of the most outward-looking economies in the region.

In sum, *Doi Moi* has served as the single most important driver of transformations in Vietnam's foreign policy over the past three decades. As the country sought to create a favourable external environment and mobilize foreign resources for its economic development, diplomacy has become an essential tool. Foreign policy breakthroughs, such as

the diplomatic normalization with China and the United States or the accession to ASEAN and WTO, have indeed contributed to Vietnam's economic success as well as its enhanced international standing. Nevertheless, there remain significant foreign policy challenges that Vietnam needs to overcome in the coming decades. Among them, managing the South China Sea disputes and handling the relationships with China and other major powers, especially the United States, emerge as the two most challenging ones.

Vietnam's Major Contemporary Foreign Policy Challenges

Managing the South China Sea Disputes

The South China Sea plays an important role in Vietnam's national defence as the long coastline makes the country vulnerable to seaborne attacks. Similarly, Vietnam would come under significant strategic constraints if it lost control over both the Paracels and the Spratlys. The sea is also essential for Vietnam's economic well-being. In 2010, for example, PetroVietnam's revenue, which was generated mainly from the company's operations in the South China Sea, accounted for 24 per cent of Vietnam's GDP (*Ha Noi Moi* 2011). The sea also brings Vietnam other significant economic benefits, such as fishery, tourism, maritime transportation and port services. In 2007, the CPV Central Committee passed a resolution on "Vietnam's Maritime Strategy Toward the Year 2020" which set the target for Vietnam to generate 53 to 55 per cent of its GDP and 55 to 60 per cent of its exports from maritime economic activities by 2020 (Dang Huong 2012).

Nevertheless, Vietnam is now locked into two increasingly heated disputes over the South China Sea. The first is related to the competing sovereignty claims over the Paracels and the Spratlys. While the Paracels dispute is mainly between Vietnam, China and Taiwan, the Spratlys row involves also the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei. The other dispute is related to conflicting claims regarding maritime boundaries in the sea. Claimant states' activities to enforce their claims have recently stoked up tensions in the region. Some notable developments include China's placement of the giant oil rig *Haiyang Shiyou* 981 in Vietnam's proclaimed exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in May 2014, and China's construction and militarization of seven artificial islands in the Spratlys since 2014.

Vietnam is of the view that the South China Sea disputes should be solved peacefully on the basis of international law, especially the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). However, given the complex nature of the disputes as well as the unwillingness of China to have the disputes addressed through legal avenues, Vietnam has also resorted to other measures to manage the disputes. Specifically, in its dealing with China, Vietnam has adopted a hedging strategy composed of four major components: economic pragmatism; direct engagement; hard balancing; and soft balancing (Hiep 2013*b*). Accordingly, while Vietnam has tried to promote economic cooperation and political engagement with China to boost mutual trust and cooperation, it has also pursued a “hard balancing” strategy against the latter through its military modernization programme. At the same time, Vietnam has also sought to “soft-balance” against China through deepened ties with other powers as well as regional multilateral arrangements, especially ASEAN.

The key challenge for Vietnam is how to simultaneously achieve the two goals: adequately protecting its national interests in the South China Sea while maintaining peace, stability and a friendly relationship with China. Given the economic and strategic importance of the South China Sea to its well-being, Vietnam will not be able to bow to pressures from China, Hanoi's main antagonist in the disputes. Rising nationalism in Vietnam means that bowing to China's pressures will do irreparable damages to the CPV's political legitimacy. Therefore, on occasion, Vietnamese leaders have managed to speak up against China and emphasized Vietnam's determination to protect its interests in the South China Sea. For example, in a press conference in the Philippines during the *Haiyang Shiyou* oil rig crisis in 2014, then Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung condemned China's actions and stated that Vietnam would not trade its sovereignty and territorial integrity for an “illusionary friendship”. On the other hand, due to the geographical proximity and the power asymmetry between the two countries, Vietnamese leaders are aware that Vietnam cannot afford a hostile relationship with China. Moreover, as China is an important trade partner for Vietnam, a broken relationship will also hurt Vietnam's economic interests. Therefore, given the contradicting nature of the two goals, handling the South China Sea disputes and China's growing maritime assertiveness will likely remain a key challenge for Vietnam in the years to come.

Balancing between China and the United States

In 1995 when Vietnam normalized its relations with the United States, it was the first time that Vietnam had enjoyed normal relations with all the major world powers. Although Vietnam emphasizes a non-alignment policy and wishes “to be a friend and a reliable partner of countries in the world community”, balancing between the major powers has been a key challenge for the country’s foreign policy. This is particularly the case since the late 2000s when strategic rivalry between China and the United States started to intensify.

China’s phenomenal rise since the late 1970s has presented the United States with a dilemma. While the sheer size of the Chinese economy and the deep economic interdependence between the two countries make it necessary for Washington to maintain a peaceful and stable relationship with Beijing, the latter’s rise in terms of hard power and its strategic ambitions have also alarmed policymakers in Washington. In particular, China’s rapid military build-up and its assertiveness in maritime disputes with neighbouring countries threaten to unravel the regional order and stability underpinned by Washington’s strategic preponderance. In response, the United States has adopted a two-pronged strategy to deal with China. On the one hand, the administration of President Barack Obama announced the “strategic rebalance” to Western Pacific by shifting 60 per cent of its naval capabilities to the region. On the other hand, the United States led negotiations to establish the TPP which involved eleven other countries on the Pacific Rim but excluded China. By late 2017, although the Trump administration has withdrawn the United States from the TPP and nominally cancelled the rebalancing strategy, the U.S. economic and military engagement with the region remains rather robust.

At the same time, Washington also seeks to strengthen bilateral relations with its traditional allies as well as emerging partners, including Vietnam. Broader frameworks for bilateral strategic cooperation have been set up with the two sides concluding a Memorandum of Understanding on defence relations in 2011. In 2013, the two countries established a comprehensive partnership. In July 2015, CPV General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong paid a historic visit to Washington, and in May 2016, President Barack Obama visited Vietnam, during which he fully lifted the longstanding lethal weapon sales ban on Hanoi. As argued by Phuong Nguyen in Chapter 3, these developments have significantly strengthened the strategic trust between the two former enemies.

The strengthened relationship with the United States was a logical development in Vietnam's foreign policy as it brings Vietnam additional leverage to deal with China's increasing pressures in the South China Sea. Nevertheless, in the context of intensifying U.S.–China strategic competition, Hanoi's endeavours to deepen ties with Washington may be interpreted by Beijing as Hanoi being recruited into the U.S.-led efforts to contain China rather than merely a move to address its grievances in the South China Sea. As such, how far and how fast Vietnam should promote its relations with the United States in order to strengthen its strategic position in the South China Sea while not overtly offending Beijing becomes a fundamental puzzle that Vietnamese strategists have to solve.

Indeed, balancing between the great powers is not a new challenge to Vietnam. During the Cold War, after the split between China and the Soviet Union, Vietnam's balancing act between the two antagonistic powers became increasingly precarious, and its decision to side with the Soviet Union in the late 1970s adequately contributed to the downward spiral in Sino–Vietnamese relations and partly accounted for China's decision to invade Vietnam in early 1979. The 1979 war was brief but extremely costly for Vietnam, and not only in terms of casualties. Aside from maintaining incessant armed harassment along the Sino–Vietnamese border in the 1980s, China also pursued a policy of isolating Vietnam diplomatically and providing aid for the Khmer Rouge's warring efforts in the Cambodian conflict to exhaust Vietnam economically. Vietnam's attempts to diversify foreign relations during the early phase of *Doi Moi* also witnessed limited success, mainly due to China's obstructions.

The current regional strategic context is far different from that of the 1970s and 1980s, but bitter memories of the 1980s are still well alive, and Vietnamese policymakers are prudent not to be caught in another great power game. While trying to forge a stronger relationship with Washington to resist China's pressures in the South China Sea, Vietnam still wishes to maintain a delicate balance between Beijing and Washington due to China's strategic importance to Vietnam's peace, stability and prosperity. The real challenge lies in the fact that China has consistently and coercively pressed its claims in the South China Sea at the expense of Vietnam as if Beijing was of the conviction that Vietnam could not escape its shadow. Such calculations by Beijing tend

to gradually push Vietnam's strategic patience to its limit, by which Vietnam may have to consider a trade-off between an amicable relationship with Beijing and its enhanced capabilities and strategic position to defend its vital interests in the South China Sea by aligning itself more closely with Washington.

That said, the best policy option for Vietnam in the foreseeable future remains walking a fine line between China and the United States. China's growing assertiveness in the South China Sea and the intensifying strategic competition between the two superpowers will make Vietnam's task ever more challenging. However, at least for the time being, a decisive shift in its balance between the two powers still proves too risky and unfeasible for Hanoi. As such, the challenge for Vietnam in managing its relations with the two superpowers will continue to feature high on its future foreign policy agenda.

Structure of the Book

Vietnam's contemporary foreign policy is both a by-product of and a major contributor to the success of *Doi Moi*. Fundamental shifts in Vietnam's foreign policy thinking and thus its diplomacy in the late 1980s and early 1990s were born out of Vietnam's desperate need to break out of international isolation and to create a favourable external environment conducive to its domestic economic reforms. At the same time, the economic success of *Doi Moi* over the past three decades has also facilitated Vietnam's efforts to "diversify and multilateralize" its foreign relations as other partners in the international community become more interested in the country, both economically or strategically. Vietnam's foreign policy has also embraced an increasingly outward-looking vision under *Doi Moi* by expanding its focus from mainly securing an external environment favourable for its socio-economic performance and regime security to pursuing active and comprehensive international integration into the global community. During this process, Vietnam's foreign policy becomes increasingly pragmatic as ideological considerations have generally receded to take a back seat in the policymaking process.

As Vietnam expands its foreign relations, however, it also finds itself faced with new-found challenges. Apart the South China Sea disputes and the triangular relationship with China and the United

States, it also has to manage increasingly complex relationships with other major powers, as well as its Southeast Asian neighbours. At the same time, it has to address issues related to its deepened international economic integration, which presents Hanoi with opportunities for economic development but also subjects the country to increasing external pressures.

In order to analyse the multiple aspects of Vietnam's foreign policy under *Doi Moi*, this book is divided into three parts, covering the overall background of Vietnam's foreign policy over the past three decades, its key international relationships, as well as topical issues that matter most to the country. The first part, including the current chapter and Chapter 2, presents an overview of Vietnam's foreign policy under *Doi Moi* and serves as the analytical and historical framework for the whole book. The second part is comprised of seven chapters examining Vietnam's bilateral relationships with its most important partners, namely the United States, China, Japan, India, Russia, Laos, Cambodia, and ASEAN. In the final part, the book examines two key issues in Vietnam's contemporary foreign policy: the South China Sea disputes and Vietnam's integration into the global economy under *Doi Moi*.

In Chapter 2, Carlyle A. Thayer presents a broad overview of the evolution of Vietnamese diplomacy from 1986 to 2016. After highlighting the seismic shifts in Vietnam's foreign policy after its adoption of *Doi Moi*, the chapter assesses the implementation of Vietnam's foreign policy of "diversifying and multilateralizing" its external relations and becoming "a friend and reliable partner" to all countries during the period 1991–2005. The chapter also analyses Vietnam's proactive international integration, including the pursuit of strategic partnerships with the major powers and regional states, in the period 2006–16. Thayer concludes that Vietnam has been able to make successful major strategic adjustments in its foreign policy to safeguard its sovereignty and national independence while promoting its prosperity over the past three decades.

In Chapter 3, Phuong Nguyen examines the evolution of strategic trust in Vietnam–U.S. relations by looking into both the institutional and agency-level factors that helped or impeded bilateral strategic trust, and thus the pace of rapprochement between the two former enemies. Towards this end, Nguyen analyses four major phases of bilateral ties from the early days of *Doi Moi* in 1987 until 2016. The author concludes that the two sides, driven by their strategic and economic interests, were able

to move the relationship forward by narrowing down areas of distrust at each stage of the relationship.

In Chapter 4, Nguyen Thanh Trung and anh Truong-Minh Vu review Vietnam–China relations under *Doi Moi*, focusing on changes in bilateral ties after the 2014 oil rig crisis, an incident that sent bilateral trust to the lowest level in decades. By investigating Vietnam's domestic and foreign policy responses after the incident, the authors argue that the incident prompted Vietnam to step up its efforts to counter China's maritime assertiveness through four key measures: strengthening relations with the United States and other major powers; reducing economic vulnerabilities vis-à-vis China; stepping up naval and maritime law enforcement modernization; and relaxing control over anti-China nationalism. The authors predict that these initiatives by Vietnam, as well as corresponding reactions by China and other regional powers, may further complicate the future trajectory of bilateral ties.

The next three chapters examine Vietnam's deepening ties with its three key strategic partners, namely Japan, India and Russia. In Chapter 5, Thuy T. Do and Julia Luong Dinh review recent developments in Vietnam–Japan relations and analyse the rationales for the two countries to lift their bilateral ties from mainly economic cooperation to a partnership of greater strategic focus. In Chapter 6, Rajeev Ranjan Chaturvedy looks into the drivers of the deepening partnership between India and Vietnam, especially the elevation of the India–Vietnam Strategic Partnership to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in September 2016. Meanwhile, Anton Tsvetov's Chapter 7 analyses Russia–Vietnam relations by assessing their recent history, contemporary state and future prospects. A common thread in the three chapters is that security and defence cooperation between Vietnam and the three powers have been deepened considerably in recent years due to the increasing convergence of their national interests, especially regarding the South China Sea. However, while Vietnam's strategic ties with Japan and India have been built on strong foundations and enjoy bright prospects, Hanoi's future strategic ties with Moscow remain uncertain, mainly due to Russia's limited interest in the South China Sea and its warm ties with Beijing.

Chapters 8 and 9 address Vietnam's relations with its Southeast Asian neighbours. In Chapter 8, Vannarith Chheang argues that Vietnam is gradually asserting its leadership role in the Mekong

subregion by tightening its traditional ties with Laos and Cambodia. The chapter also assesses the achievements, challenges, and remaining issues in Vietnam's relations with the two neighbours, especially against the backdrop of China's rising influence in Southeast Asia. Meanwhile, in Chapter 9, based on Vietnam's diplomatic archive and interviews with Vietnamese foreign policymakers and diplomats, Nguyen Vu Tung and Dang Cam Tu examine the link between Vietnam's pursuit of ASEAN membership in the early 1990s and its efforts to resist China's pressures in the South China Sea. The chapter contends that Hanoi did not seriously consider its prospective ASEAN membership as a strategic tool to counter China's expansion in the South China Sea because Hanoi realized that ASEAN was indeed not a military organization, and ASEAN members did not want to antagonize China by supporting Vietnam in the South China Sea disputes.

In Chapter 10, Ha Anh Tuan shows how Vietnam's perceptions of the South China Sea disputes and ASEAN's role in managing them have evolved over the past two decades. By dissecting Vietnam's South China Sea strategy since 2007, the author argues that Hanoi considers the South China Sea disputes as a highly complicated security issue that warrants a multi-faceted approach, which includes three main elements: improving relations with China, building up domestic capabilities to deter against hostile actions in the South China Sea, and engaging regional stakeholders, especially ASEAN, to play a more active role in managing the disputes.

The final two chapters analyse Vietnam's process of international integration under *Doi Moi*. In Chapter 11, To Minh Thu reviews the contextual and ideological drivers behind Vietnam's international integration policy. The chapter argues that Vietnam's international economic integration happened in parallel with its domestic transformation from a centrally-planned to a market-based economy. During this process, the economic thinking of the CPV gradually evolved to adapt to changes in the internal and external conditions, and to maximize the benefits that international integration could contribute to the Party's domestic agenda. Meanwhile, in Chapter 12, Hoang Hai Ha examines Vietnam's reactions to the European Union's diffusion of norms through trade. Using the EU–Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (EUVFTA) as a case study, the chapter argues that Vietnam imports norms diffused by the EU through the EUVFTA negotiations at various

levels, depending on its perception of national interests as well as its political, cultural and economic background. Vietnam selects and adapts certain EU norms and values that help promote its economic development while rejecting those that Hanoi perceives as incompatible with its domestic interests and the CPV's political agenda.

NOTES

1. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, for example, the MOFA was marginalized and the CPV's Commission of External Affairs took a decisive role in the handling of Vietnam's relations with China and Cambodia (Co 2003; Elliott 2012, chapter 2).
2. Vietnam has upgraded its strategic partnerships with China, Russia and India into "comprehensive strategic partnerships".

REFERENCES

- Co, Tran Quang. "Hoi uc va suy nghi: 1975–1991" [Memoir and Reflections: 1975–1991]. Unpublished manuscript, 2003.
- Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV). *Văn kiện Đảng toàn tập* [Complete Collection of Party Documents]. Vol. 47 [1986]. Hà Nội: NXB Chính trị quốc gia [National Political Publishing House], 2006.
- . *Văn kiện đại hội đại biểu toàn quốc thời kỳ đổi mới* [Documents of National Congresses in the Era of Doi Moi]. Vol. 1. Hà Nội: NXB Chính trị quốc gia [National Political Publishing House], 2010.
- . "Dự thảo Báo cáo chính trị của Ban Chấp hành Trung ương Đảng khoá XI tại Đại hội đại biểu toàn quốc lần thứ XII của Đảng" [Draft Political Report of the Eleventh Central Committee to the Party's Twelfth National Congress], 15 September 2015. Available at <<http://laodong.com.vn/chinh-tri/du-thao-bao-cao-chinh-tri-cua-ban-chap-hanh-trung-uong-dang-khoa-xi-tai-dai-hoi-dai-bieu-toan-quooc-lan-thu-xii-cua-dang-376284.bld>> (accessed 17 November 2015).
- Dang Huong. "Bien Dong va Chien Luoc bien Viet Nam den 2020" [The East Sea and Vietnam's Maritime Strategy towards 2020]. *VNEconomy*, 29 January 2012. Available at <<http://vneconomy.vn/2012129112717475P0C9920/bien-dong-va-chien-luoc-bien-viet-nam-den-2020.htm>> (accessed 12 March 2012).
- Elliott, David W.P. *Changing Worlds: Vietnam's Transition from Cold War to Globalization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- General Statistics Office of Vietnam (GSO). *Statistical Handbook of Vietnam 2014*. Hanoi: Statistical Publishing House, 2015.

- Ha Noi Moi*. “Doanh thu năm 2010 của Tập đoàn Dầu khí: Đóng góp 24% vào GDP của cả nước” [PetroVietnam's 2010 Revenue Accounts for 24 per cent of GDP], 2011. Available at <<http://hanoimoi.com.vn/Tin-tuc/Kinh-te/420974/dong-gop-24-vao-gdp-cua-ca-nuoc>> (accessed 12 March 2012).
- Hiep, Le Hong. “Performance-based Legitimacy: The Case of the Communist Party of Vietnam and *Doi Moi*”. *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 34, no. 2 (2012): 145–72.
- . “Vietnam's Domestic–Foreign Policy Nexus: *Doi Moi*, Foreign Policy Reform, and Sino–Vietnamese Normalization”. *Asian Politics & Policy* 5, no. 3 (2013a): 387–406.
- . “Vietnam's Hedging Strategy against China since Normalization”. *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 35, no. 3 (2013b): 333–68.
- Hung, N.M. “Thuc hien nhât quan duong loi doi ngoai doc lap, tu chu, hoa binh, hop tac va phat trien” [Consistently Implementing the Foreign Policy of Independence, Autonomy, Peace, and Development]. *Tap chi Cong san* [Communist Review] 17 (2006): 14–18.
- Ministry of Defence. *Quoc phong Viet Nam nhung nam dau the ky XXI* [Vietnam's National Defence in the First Years of the 21st Century]. Hanoi: Ministry of Defence, 2004.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), Vietnam. *Bộ Ngoại giao: 70 năm xây dựng và phát triển (1945–2015)*. Hanoi: National Political Publishing House, 2015.
- Mya, Than. “Vietnam's External Trade, 1975–91: A Survey in the Southeast Asian Context”. In *Vietnam's Dilemmas and Options: The Challenge of Economic Transition in the 1990s*, edited by Than Mya and Joseph L.-H. Tan. Singapore: ASEAN Economic Research Unit, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1993.
- Nam, P.D. “Ngoại giao Viet Nam sau 20 năm đổi mới” [Vietnam's Diplomacy after 20 Years of Renovation]. *Tap chi Cong san* [Communist Review] 14 (2006): 26–30.
- Nguyen, Lien-Hang T. *Hanoi's War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012.
- Palmujoki, E. *Vietnam and the World: Marxist-Leninist Doctrine and the Changes in International Relations, 1975–93*. London: Macmillan Press, 1997.
- . “Ideological and Foreign Policy: Vietnam's Marxist-Leninist Doctrine and Global Change, 1986–1996”. In *Vietnamese Foreign Policy in Transition*, edited by Carlyle A. Thayer and Ramses Amer. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asia Studies, 1999, pp. 25–43.
- Porter, Gareth. “Vietnam and the Socialist Camp: Center or Periphery?” In *Vietnamese Communism in Comparative Perspective*, edited by William S. Turley. Boulder: Westview Press, 1980, pp. 225–64.
- . “The Transformation of Vietnam's World-View: From Two Camps to Interdependence”. *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 12, no. 1 (1990): 1–19.
- Thayer, Carlyle A. “Vietnamese Perspectives on International Security: Three Revolutionary Currents”. In *Asian Perspectives on International Security*, edited by Donald H. McMillen. London: Macmillan Press, 1984, pp. 57–76.

-
- . “Sino–Vietnamese Relations: The Interplay of Ideology and National Interest”. *Asian Survey* 34, no. 6 (1994a): 513–28.
- . *The Vietnam People's Army under Doi Moi*. Pacific Strategic Paper 7. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1994b.
- . “Vietnam's Strategic Readjustment”. In *China as a Great Power: Myths, Realities and Challenges in the Asia-Pacific Region*, edited by Stuart Harris and Gary Klintworth. Melbourne: Longman Australia, 1995, pp. 185–201.
- Vuving, Alexander L. “The Two-Headed Grand Strategy: Vietnamese Foreign Policy since Doi Moi”. Paper presented at the Vietnam Update 2004: Strategic and Foreign Relations, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 2004.