

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM'S DEFENSE POLICY IN ENCOUNTERING PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA'S STRATEGIC POSITION IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA DISPUTE

Implementasi Kebijakan Pertahanan Republik Sosialis Vietnam dalam Menghadapi Posisi Strategis Republik Rakyat China di Sengketa Laut China Selatan

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Abstrak

Posisi strategis China dalam Laut China Selatan telah mengundang banyak kontroversi, terutama dengan negara penuntut. Aktivitas yang telah dilakukan oleh China memicu tensi tinggi terutama dengan Vietnam sebagai salah satu penggugat terbesar di sengketa Laut China Selatan. China telah melakukan pengeboran minyak di laut yang bersengketa dengan Vietnam dan menyerang kapal eksplorasi minyak yang beroperasi di wilayah EEZ Vietnam sebagai bagian dari Laut China Selatan. Contoh aksi Beijing tersebut telah membuat Hanoi khawatir atas gugatan mereka di Laut China Selatan. Pada tahun 2009, Vietnam mengeluarkan Buku Putih Pertahanan berisi kebijakan pertahanan Vietnam serta kepedulian Vietnam dalam sengketa Laut China Selatan. Vietnam telah menerapkan kebijakan pertahanan di bidang ekonomi, militer, politik, dan teknologi. Implementasi kebijakan pertahanan Vietnam adalah bagian dari tindakan Vietnam dalam menghadapi posisi strategis China di perairan yang disengketakan. Secara general, tulisan ini bermaksud untuk menganalisa persoalan khusus dengan menggunakan teori realisme defensive dan kebijakan pertahanan untuk menjawab pertanyaan penelitian bagaimana Vietnam mengimplementasikan kebijakan pertahanannya dalam menghadapi posisi strategis China di Laut China Selatan.

Kata kunci: Kebijakan Pertahanan, Vietnam, Sengketa Laut China Selatan, China.

Abstract

China's strategic position in the South China Sea dispute has created lots of controversy, particularly with the claimants. The activities done by China have triggered heightened tensions especially with Vietnam as one of the biggest claimants in the disputed sea. China did oil drilling in the disputed water with Vietnam and attacked oil exploration vessel which operates in the Vietnamese ZEE as a part of the South China Sea water. Those examples of Beijing actions have made Hanoi worries upon their claims in the South China Sea. In 2009 Vietnam released Defense White Paper which contained the defense policy of Vietnam as well as Vietnam's concerns upon the South China Sea dispute. Vietnam has implemented its defense policy in the field of economy, military, politics, and technology. The implementation of Vietnam defense policy is a part of Vietnam's action in encountering China's strategic position in the disputed waterways. In general, this writing aimed to analyze the particular issues by using the theories of defensive realism and defense policy to answer the research question on how Vietnam implemented its defense policy in encountering China's strategic position in the South China Sea dispute.

Keywords: defense policy, Vietnam, South China Sea dispute, China.

Introduction

The South China Sea (SCS) dispute is a dispute over maritime territory and bordering six claimants; China, Taiwan, Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Brunei in the South China Sea. This dispute is not only a dispute over territory and sovereignty, yet also the dispute of strategic interests, maritime dispute, and the major power disputes. The issues over the territorial water have begun since 1947 after China has claimed the area of the South China Sea under the government of Kuomintang, however there was no agreement yet over the area. Tensions between China and other claimant in the South China Sea are escalating, as a result of China's growing assertiveness in the waterways. The claimants somehow worried about their claims and China's strategic position should become the obstacles of securing their interests. Vietnam as one of the biggest claimant in South China Sea is trying to acquire its interests in the territory. Realizing China as a great power in the region has made Vietnam put its best foot forward. As one of the closest alliance of China, does not make Vietnam acknowledge all of China's effort in claiming the ownership of the territory. Vietnam put its best effort in dealing with this issue.¹

Back in 1973, a number of Chinese fishing vessels have entered the waters of the Crescent group controlled by Republic of Vietnam and the battle between Chinese and Vietnamese fishing vessels began. Recently on June 2014, armed clash between Chinese Vessel and Vietnamese Vessel injured two Vietnamese sailors and create several damages to the ship. Realize how big effort of China in managing the dispute, Vietnam feel disrupted, enhancing the needs to secure the nation's interests and uphold sovereignty, Vietnam will be bravely encounter China in South China Sea². In 2009 Vietnam establishes the latest written

Defense Policy through the Defense White Paper as a guidance of action in managing the South China Sea dispute. Although not merely concerning the South China Sea, Vietnam has clearly established its own interests covering water areas and islands including the Paracels and the spratlys in the territory.

Defensive Realism and Defense Policy Theory

Defensive Realism argues that the states are the prominent actors navigating the system that rationally will seek their main interests which is survival. The nature of the system is anarchy, therefore no central authority in governing the system. According to Defensive Realism, a state feeling threatened by a stronger state will seek self-protection through ambitious military, economic and diplomatic strategies.³

Unlike Offensive Realism that argues that the best way for states to seek survival is to pursue military hegemony by conquering many other nations and invade them militarily. Meanwhile, Defensive Realism denies that the pursuit of hegemony is necessary, and argues that the states must simply be strong enough to resist invasion. In other words, the main interest is how to maintain security without invasion and being invade. It is not saying that the states were not interested in aggressively expanding, even if they were inclined to expand, the very feature of international system would lead them not to do so.⁴

This theory pretended to be rational to analyze the position of Vietnam in SCS. Realize how big the role of China in the territory, Vietnam has no choice yet to do self-protection in order to survive. The Defensive Realism has proven that a state feeling threatened by a stronger state will seek self protection, as what Vietnam did. All actions taken by Vietnam in the South China Sea is one of the kind of self protection in order to be able to survive

¹ Weifeng Zhou, "China's growing assertiveness in the South China Sea," *Elcano Royal Institute Journal*, (2015): 1.

² Declan Hayes, *Japan the Toothless Tiger* (Singapore: Tuttle, 2013), 6-19.

³ Jason J. Blazevic, "Navigating the Security Dilemma: China, Vietnam, and the South China Sea," *Journal of Current South East Asian Affairs*, (2012): 81.

⁴ Kenneth N. Waltz, *the Theory of International Politics* (Chicago: Waveland Press, 1979)

by securing its national interests in the South China Sea. The gap between China's authorities compared to Vietnam's authority has made an effort for Vietnam to survive without military hegemony.

The second theory to be used in this writing is the theory of defense policy. The defense policy is a strategy of a state in the form of action that aims to influence and determine decisions, actions, and other issues relating to the conduct of military affairs, consistent with state's security strategy. In simple explanation, Defense policy is a variety of continuous activities undertaken by the states to ensure its national security.⁵

The concept on how a nation-state implements its defense policy showed by the figure below:

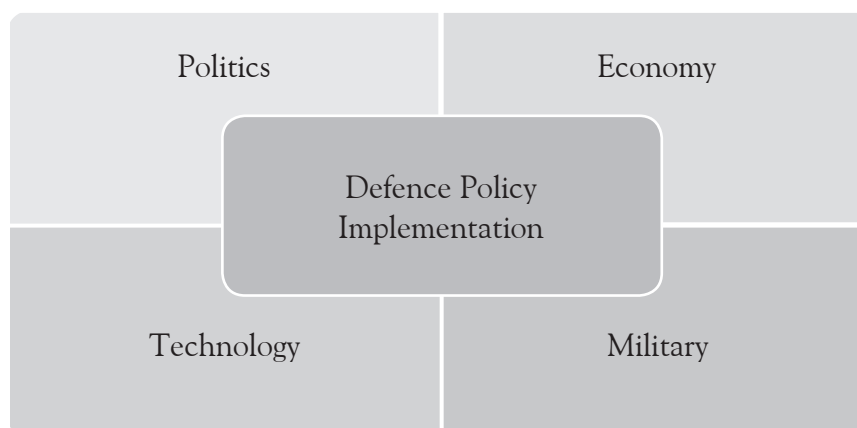


Figure 1. The Implementation of Defense Policy

Politics

Politics is a fundamental component on how a nation-state implements the defense policy. It inherently applied on the political system. Politics will be transformed into physical power in implementing the national defense. It can be applied in building people awareness, belief, emotion, will, and psychology toward running the national defense duties.

Focus on how Vietnam implement its defense policy through politics, it can be seen by the result of the long process of the nation founding father, President Ho Chi Minh and the leadership of Communist Party of Vietnam

⁵ Todor Tagarev, "The Art of Shaping Defense Policy: Scope, Components, Relationships (but no algorithms)," *The Quarterly Journal*, (2006): 16-19.

(CPV), in shaping the way of thinking of the Vietnamese to defend the nation. This is very important, since the basic stage of implementing the defense policy will not running smoothly without its people's awareness.

Economy

The economic potential is important to support the implementation of the defense policy; the allocation of the military budget for defense requirements is absolutely needed to support the implementation of the defense policy. Vietnam thinks it is important to allocate several budgets for defense purposes. As the increased number of Vietnam's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) year by year, the budget allocation for the defense sector

increased as well. This indicates the role of economic potential is important to sustain the implementation of the defense policy.

Technology

Vietnam has been doing investment in enhancing science and technology as a part of the policy implementation. Vietnam has been developing its military science and technology to be adjusted for the military equipment and weapons for the arm forces and new weapon that might be needed in future wars.

Military

The implementation of the defense policy in the field of military can be use in both peacetime and wartime. Military becomes the primary element of the national defense

potential which is built on the basis of politics, economy, and technology. The implementation of the policy is not only being implemented on the improvement of the combat power and armed forces but also in manpower.

China's Strategic Position in the South China Sea

shipping route passes the disputed waterways as the fact that the South China Sea becomes one of the busiest shipping lanes as more than 50 percent of the world's annual merchant fleet tonnage passes the South China Sea each year. The shipping route will be very beneficial for expand China's economic building.⁷

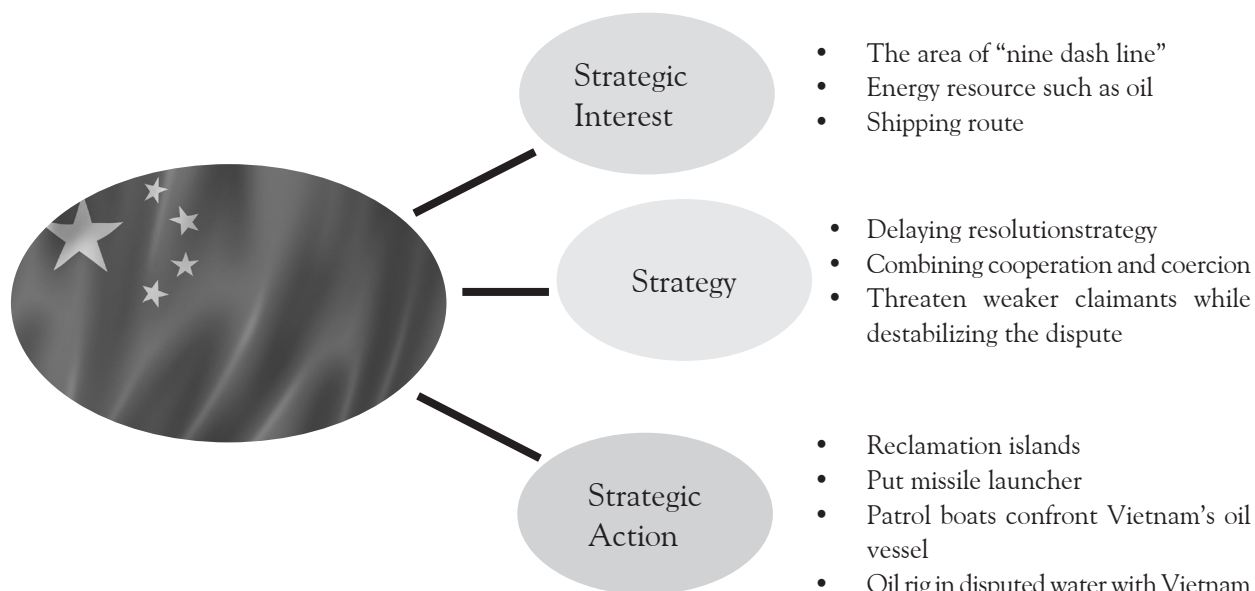


Figure 2. China's Strategic Position in the South China Sea

China's Strategic Interest

China as the main player in the SCS dispute definitely has significant interests that will be very beneficial if China could achieve those interests. China's claim over the waterways covering the area called the "Nine Dash Line" which covered almost the entire area. Another main interest of China is oil resources. The needs of China towards oil has dramatically increased over the year. As the fact that China had become the third-top country of daily oil consumption in 2011 right after U.S. and European Union states (EU). As in 2016, China's demand towards oil seems increased until 4.3 percent; surpass 11 million barrels per day. This significant number provides the thirst of China towards demanded oil⁶. China also interested in maintaining the flow of the

"Whosoever commands the sea commands the trade, whosoever commands the trade of the world commands the riches of the world, and consequently the world itself". (Toth 1995)

China claims almost the whole part of SCS, marked by the nine-dash line at SCS map appeared at the first time by PRC's official in 1949 although scholars have argued that those claims has no legal basis and undefined until now. The nine-dash line includes the area of the disputed territory of Paracels and Spratly islands.⁸

China's interests over the maritime territory also stated on China's Defense White Paper back in 2013 as mention below:

"... It is an essential national development strategy to exploit, utilize and protect the seas and oceans, and build China into a maritime power." (China 2013)

⁶ CNBC, "China oil demand to grow 4.3 percent in 2016: CNPC research," CNBC, January 26 2016, accessed October 24 2016, <http://www.cnbc.com/2016/01/26/china-oil-demand-to-grow-43-percent-in-2016-cnpc-research.html>

⁷ Center for naval Analysis and the Institute for National Strategic Studies, "South China Sea Oil Shipping Lanes," 15.

⁸ Taylor M. Fravel, "China's Strategy in The SCS," *Contemporary South East Asia*, Vol 33(2011): 294.

China's interests in SCS dealing with history and politics of oil and security. The most scholars said that China's claims over the territorial dispute in the SCS is not based on the interpretation of International law, yet rather than the interpretation of China itself, that is why it has no legal basis to support China's claim over the territory. China's interest in the SCS is a part of China's interests to become the world major power. If China winning the game and becomes the owner of SCS, China will dominate the Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) as important for its economic growth. China can also meet the needs of oil if China can control the area of Paracel and Spratly islands.⁹

China's Strategy

"Delaying strategy" has been identified by many analysts to be used by China in the disputed sea. "Delaying strategy" is neither use cooperation nor coercion in managing the dispute, but rather than choose the middle ways. This strategy will be beneficial in maintaining existing claims in a dispute. In running the South China Sea dispute, China had use strategy to maintain and how to secure its position in the dispute. China did not either use cooperation or coercion as a strategy in managing South China Sea dispute, yet China combining those two elements. At the first China will maintain peace above all else, but to prevent the other claimant enhance their power in the South China Sea. If something threaten China, China will attack themback.¹⁰

"China maintains valuing peace above all else, advocating the settlement of disputes through peaceful means, prudence on the issue of war, and the strategy of attacking only after being attacked." (M. o. China, China's Strategy Principles 2010)

Over since 1990, China had used the strategy of delaying the resolution of the dispute

⁹ Salvatore Babones, "Why China Cares About the SCS," *Al-Jazeera*, July 16 2016, accessed October 20 2016, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2016/07/china-cares-south-china-sea160714105126859.html>

¹⁰ Taylor M. Fravel, *Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Dispute* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008)

as its main strategy in SCS. In delaying the dispute, China could achieve two goals which can very beneficial for them. The goal of this delaying resolution strategy is to merge all China's claim on maritime rights, sovereignty, and jurisdiction over the SCS territory, and to block other claimant from enhancing their overlapping claims with China.¹¹

China's strategy in the SCS dispute is to combine its own claims, by combining those claims; it will threaten other claimant weaker than China together destabilizing the dispute. By delaying the solution of the dispute, China could control the condition as well as able to prevent the escalation of tensions among the claimant.¹²

China's Strategic Action

"China will take all necessary measures to protect its territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests," (C. P. China 2016)

China has insisted its sovereignty over the South China Sea dispute since 2009, such as insisted annual fishing ban, conducting any maritime patrols, as well as carrying out scientific survey and military training in the disputed area of the South China Sea. China also enforcing the law of the maritime in the South China Sea area and somehow it triggered more tensions with other claimants¹³. China's strategic action in the South China Sea such as creating the reclamation islands as well as military equipment set up in those islands as shown on below figure. Particularly with Vietnam, the clash between China and Vietnam happened such as the case of China's vessels confront Vietnam's oil exploration vessels in 2011, and recently in 2016 China's Oil rig activities in disputed area fall within Vietnam's and China's overlapped water and triggered more tensions between both of two states.¹⁴

¹¹ Taylor M. Fravel, "China's Strategy in The SCS," *Contemporary South East Asia*, Vol 33 (2011): 294.

¹² Fravel, "China's Strategy in The SCS," 297.

¹³ Zhou, "China's growing assertiveness in the South China Sea," 2.

¹⁴ Joseph Santolan, "Chinese Patrol Boats Confront Vietnamese Oil Exploration Ship in SCS," *World Socialist Website*, (May 312011)



Figure 3. Fiery Cross Reef as one of China's Reclamation Island in SCS

Source: AMTI and the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, "Land Reclamation by Country," AMTI, accessed October 31 2016, <https://amti.csis.org/island-tracker/>.



Figure 4. Before and after picture of the deployment of China's missile launchers

Source: ImageSat, "China's Missile Launchers on Woody Island South China Sea," *Fox News*, February 2016, accessed October 31 2016, <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2016/02/16/exclusive-china-sends-surface-to-air-missiles-to-contested-island-in-provocative-move.html>.

The Defense Policy of Vietnam

Vietnam has followed the defense policy named "all-people" national defense. Vietnam's effort in enhancing the capabilities of its human resources to the development of its defense as well as its modern technology has been on the rise. Vietnam believes that self-effort is very beneficial as a problem solver in every aspect of today's world. Vietnam opposes the aggressive war, that is why the all-people national defense

is believed will be beneficial in protecting Vietnam's national sovereignty.

"... national defense policy of peace and self-defense expressed in the guideline of not using force or threatening of using force in international relations; solves differences and disputes by peaceful means." (Vietnam 2009)

Based on the defense white paper of Vietnam 2009, Vietnam's defense policy has followed the guideline of peace and self-defense, means not using force and threatening the other

states. To build the national defense posture, Vietnam advocates gradual modernization of the Vietnam People's Army (VPA) and enhance the defense potential to maintain the self-defense capability. Eventhough Vietnam chooses not to use force, Vietnam always ready to fight against all aggressive acts coming to them.

The Defense Component of Vietnam

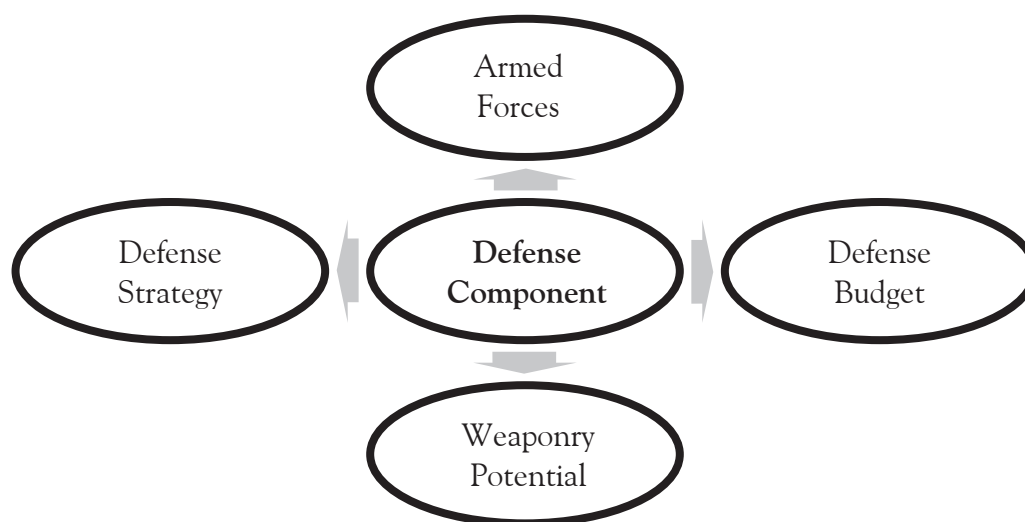


Figure 5. The Defense Component of Vietnam

The sovereignty and security of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam cannot be rid from several defense components. In order to preserve and defend the sovereignty and security of the homeland, Vietnam has been managed several defense component such as human resources which derived from the armed forces, financial which is the defense budget, technology such as weaponry potential and military equipment, and the strategy such as the defense cooperation.

Armed Forces

Vietnam itself has two types of armed forces; each force has its own tasks according to the law of the defense Socialist Republic of Vietnam. The Vietnam People's Army (VPA) and the Militia and Self-Defense are expected to perform well in running their duties to defend the homeland as stated on the quotation below:

"The armed forces are the key component of the national defense. The armed forces have the task of combat readiness, combat to defend the state, the contribution to the development and modernization of the state." (Vietnam 2009)

The VPA is the primary Vietnamese arm forces. The VPA is eager to perform its duties in defending the homeland. VPA is forerunner by the Vietnam Propaganda Unit of the Liberation Army placed below the administrative of the former Vietnam President, Ho Chi Minh.¹⁵

Since the Independence Day of Vietnam in September 1945, the Army developed into 50.000 personnel which organized into 40 detachments.

As per 2009 Defense White Paper data, Vietnam has 450.000 VPA active personnel which ready to perform their duties to defend the homeland.¹⁶

Militia and Self-Defense Force is also a component of Vietnam's armed forces and placed under the leadership of the CPV. Militia and Self-Defense Force work at the local region of Vietnam, ensuring the stability and give protection to the land and to the people. Militia and Self-Defense Force work in both peacetime and wartime. In peacetime, Militia and Self-Defense Force work to prevent and overcome the impact of natural disaster, and other incidents. The main duty of Militia and Self-defense Force in peacetime is to ensure the local defense zones. Other than that, Militia and Self-Defense Force also work together with the Border Guard of VPA in protecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Vietnam.¹⁷

¹⁵ Ministry of National Defense Socialist Republic of Vietnam, "Vietnam National Defense," *The Defense White Paper of Vietnam*, (2009): 63-64.

¹⁶ Vietnam, "Vietnam National Defense," 69.

¹⁷ Shelton L. Woods, *Vietnam: A Global Studies Handbook* (California: ABC-CLIO, 2002)

Defense Budget

“It is needed to set aside for the part of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in order to enhance the development of the defense sector.” (Vietnam 2009)

	2005	2006	2007	2008
GDP	839,211	973,791	1,143,442	1,490,000
Defence budget	16,278	20,577	28,922	27,024
Share in GDP	1.872%	2.194%	2.529%	1.813%

Table 1. The Defense Budget of Vietnam as Per Defense White Paper 2009

Source: Ministry of National Defense Socialist Republic of Vietnam, “Vietnam National Defense,” *The Defense White Paper of Vietnam*, (2009): 38.

Vietnam has put aside a partial amount of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for the defense budget purposes. As a part of the defense component, Vietnam has set aside its defense budget for the development of its military capability. The table below shows the partial amount of GDP spent for the defense sector. During those four years, Vietnam has maintained the stability of the defense spending budget. The amount of the budget adjust to the needs of Vietnam in facing particular situations.

Weaponry Potential

Weaponry potential is also considered as the defense component of Vietnam. Weaponry is a potentiality that could be mobilized in both peacetime and wartime and important as a part of the defense of a state. Vietnam has developed and improved its weaponry potential in order to increase its readiness to the upcoming situation, as well as increase its capacity in the military development. The development of the weaponry potential is linked to the state industrialization and modernization.¹⁸

“Vietnam pays serious attention in dealing with the weaponry potential to enhance the defense system, as well as to provide the Vietnamese armed forces with the developed weaponry and military equipment.” (M. o. Vietnam, Vietnam National Defence 2009)

¹⁸ Ministry of National Defense Socialist Republic of Vietnam, “Vietnam National Defense,” *The Defense White Paper of Vietnam*, (2009): 39.

In order to enhance the capabilities to provide modern technology and advanced weaponry, Vietnam has made an appropriate investment in producing some weapon by its own technological capability, this production activity also supported by the development of the modern scientist, as well as well-educated and well-trained human resources to enhance the development.¹⁹

As a component of the national industry, Vietnam’s national defense is developing based on self-reliance. Vietnam also makes cooperation with other states in the field of the defense industry; the aim of this cooperation is to enhance the awareness of the Vietnamese and to encourage them to be able to produce the advanced technologies as what the other states were done. As the time goes by, Vietnam has been able in repairing and improving the weapon and military technical equipment.

Vietnam Defense Strategy

“Defense cooperation is one of the most important factors for maintaining peace and stability in the region and the world as well, and it is also an important factor for achieving Vietnam’s defense goals.” (M. o. Vietnam, Vietnam National Defence 2009)

Vietnam believed, defense cooperation is one of the most significant factors in maintaining international peace and stability and become an important goal for achieving Vietnam’s defense goals. This is considered as Vietnam’s defense strategy on how to achieve its defense goals. Vietnam realizes that the cooperation with other states as well as the international community will be beneficial for Vietnam’s defense goals. Vietnam has been actively engaged in cooperation with both of independent states, as well as with the international community. Vietnam is willing to widen its bilateral defense relations with the other states. The concern of Vietnam’s defense relations related to the cooperation with the other states such as sending delegations, and training.²⁰

¹⁹ Vietnam, “Vietnam National Defense,” 99.

²⁰ Vietnam, “Vietnam National Defense,” 23-24.

The Implementation of Vietnam's Defence Policy Toward China.

Defense Budget Allocation

Vietnam has been allocating some budgets for for the defense sector. Vietnam has become a state that push strong growth of the defense budget in the Southeast Asia together with Indonesia, while the rest of the Southeast Asian state's defense budget are remained stable and few of them reduced the defense budget²¹.

"The state of Vietnam has allocated a necessary portion of the state budget for defense requirements in general and for the acquisition of equipment and weapons for the armed forces in particular." (M. o. Vietnam, Vietnam National Defence 2009)

Over the past years, Vietnam has been allocated budget for defense sector, particularly in 2012 the state of Vietnam show the significant increase of the defense budget. Vietnam's defense budget was 3.3 billion USD, representing 16.9 per cent real increase compared to 2011 budget²². The allocation of the defense budget of Vietnam shows on below Figure.

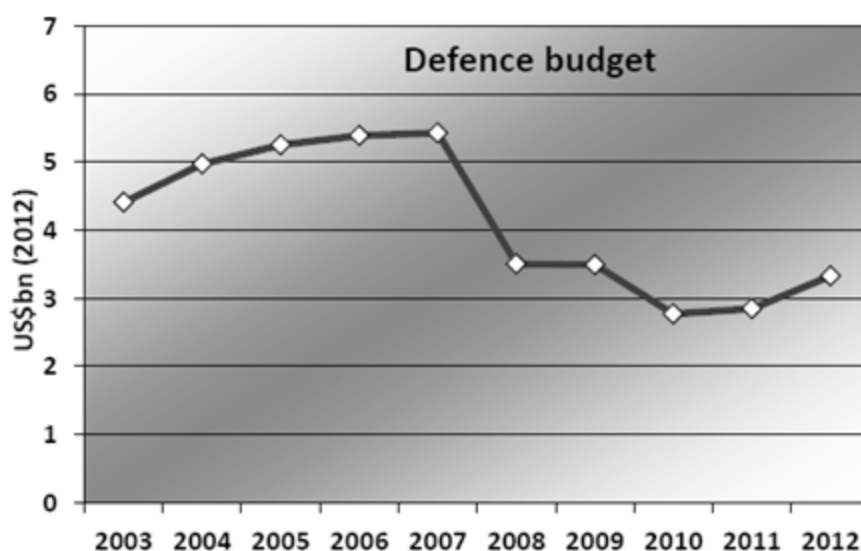


Figure 6. The Allocation of Vietnam's Defense Budget

Source: Defense Intelligence Organization, "Defense Economic Trends in the Asia-Pacific," *DIO Reference*, (2013) : 29.

According to the Defense Minister of Vietnam, it has proven that Vietnam will concern on the modernization of its Navy to protect the country. It has true also that the most of Vietnam's defense budget were spent for maritime necessity. Military modernization in the maritime aspects has pushed Vietnam as China challenge grows. Vietnam has increased its military spending in recent years as a series of territorial disputes particularly with China.

As the economic growth, Vietnam enhance its capability in the field of military by modernize its military weapons. Many sources mentioned that Vietnam has been modernize its Navy by purchased several military equipment. In recent years, Vietnam has become the eight largest importer of weaponry in the world during 2011-2015, during that period Vietnamese naval vessels accounted for 44 per cent of the defense import.²³

In recent years, 80 per cent of military purchases of Vietnam were coming from Russia. In 2009, for example, Vietnam has purchased six Kilo-class submarines in which the last submarine will be delivered this mid-

²¹ Defense Intelligence Organization, "Defense Economic Trends in the Asia-Pacific," *DIO Reference*, (2013) : 4.

²² Defense Intelligence Organization, "Defense Economic Trends in the Asia-Pacific," 5.

²³ Zachary Abuza and Nguyen Nhat Anh, "Vietnam's Military Modernization," *The Diplomat*, October 28 2016, accessed December 4 2016, <http://thediplomat.com/2016/10/vietnams-military-modernization/>.

year. Those submarines will make Vietnam as the most advanced submarines fleet in the region. In 2011, Vietnam has also acquired two Gepard-class frigates as the most modern surface warfare ships which also equipped with advanced anti-submarine warfare capabilities. Vietnam also has acquired two fast Molniya missile attack crafts from Russia equipped with additional capabilities including being armed with Klub ship-to-shore missiles that enable Vietnam the ability to target any facilities that China has constructed in the Spratlys and Paracels.

It can be argued that Vietnam has built its stronger financial capability in order to be able to defend the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the homeland. As the economy grows, Vietnam allocated the defense budget which most of the spending went to the modernization of its navy, which can be argued as the Vietnam's concern to the territorial dispute in the SCS, mainly as a response to China's growing assertiveness in the region.²⁴

Major Vietnam's Actions in the South China Sea

Land Reclamation

Vietnam has carried out significant land reclamation on the SCS, particularly in the Spratlys. Vietnam has acknowledged its action on building Reclamation Island in the SCS was related to the concern of protecting its sovereign rights over the dispute. The United States has called for an end to the island building in the SCS as stated by its Defense Secretary, Ash Carter. The Vietnam's action on building the islands was not a part of expanded its claim, yet to prevent wave erosion. Vietnam island-building in the SCS is different from what have been done by China in building the islands. The aim of the island building for Vietnam is to facilitate the people and soldiers deployed in the area in ensuring their safety, since the

²⁴ Sophia Yanh, "Vietnam's defense spending is \$5 billion and rising fast," May 23 2016, accessed December 4 2016, <http://money.cnn.com/2016/05/23/news/vietnam-military-spending/>.

island-building is to prevent wave erosion. This is what has distinguished Vietnam's with China's land reclamation.²⁵

Vietnam has carried out significant land reclamation on the South China Sea, particularly in the Spratlys. Vietnam has acknowledged its action on building Reclamation Island in the South China Sea was related to the concern of protecting its sovereign rights over the dispute. Vietnam has doing reclamations at two Spratly features: Sand Cay and West Reef. Vietnam has starting to build Reclamation Island since 2012, as captured by Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative (AMTI) satellite. The director of AMTI, Mira Rapp-Hooper, at the Center for Strategic and International Studies said that the images has showed that Vietnam had reclaimed about 65.000 square meters of land at West Reef and 21.000 square meters at Sand Cay.²⁶

Submarine-Launched Land Attack Missiles

Vietnam has purchased 50 anti-ship and land attack missiles for its kilo-class submarines in 2015. Vietnam is connecting its submarine fleet with land attack missiles that predicted could be able in reaching Chinese coastal cities that can be concluded as an action to deter China in the disputed sea. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) based on the information obtained from the UN register of conventional arms, Russia has delivered 28 missiles to Vietnam out of 50 missiles ordered by Vietnam in total.²⁷

²⁵ According to the United States Defense Secretary, Ash Carter, during the discussion with Vietnam's Defense Minister Phung Quang Thanh regarding the proposal for a permanent halt to reclamation and militarization of the islands in the SCS. Carter said that what have been done by Vietnam was not categorized as an island expansion, yet to prevent the environmental issues that might be happened in the island.

David Alexander, "Vietnam, U.S. Discuss Land Reclamation In South China Sea," June 2 2016, accessed December 9 2016, <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/>.

²⁶ Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, "Vietnam Island Building," AMTI, 2015, accessed December 9 2016, <https://amti.csis.org/vietnam-island-building/>.

²⁷ Greg Torode, "Vietnam buys submarine-launched land attack missiles to deter China," *UK Reuters*, April 30 2015, accessed December 9 2016, <http://uk.reuters.com/>.

Vietnam is the first Southeast Asian Country to arm its submarine fleet with missiles. The missiles are capable to strike at a range of 300 kilometers, put China as the potential targets remaining the ongoing dispute of the SCS. Regional military attaches, as well as analysts have seen the purchased missiles as a sign of Vietnam's determination to counter China's action and strategic position in the SCS. As a potential targets, Vietnam will more likely see closer ports, airfields, naval base, as well as facilities on the reclamation islands that has been built by China in the SCS.²⁸

"The purpose of Vietnam's counter-intervention strategy of purchasing the submarine-missiles is intended to deter China from deploying PLAN warships at the lower end of the conflict spectrum." (Thayer 2014)

Coast Guard Vessel for Patrol

In 2014 the National Assembly of Vietnam has planned to purchase seven boats for patrol around disputed water. The Vietnam Coast Guard (VCG) has received two out of seven high-speed patrol vessels and a multi-purpose transport ship to strengthen and defend its sovereignty, CSB-4038 and CSB-4039. Those patrol vessels is equipped with high technology which can operate at a minimum speed of 35 nautical miles per hour in 30 days at sea. Those ships are built by the local shipbuilding company that placed under Vietnam's General Department of Defense Industry.²⁹

In 2016, James Boat Technologies (JBT) has received a new order for a dozen 13.66m patrol boats for Vietnam Coast Guard. The commander of VCG Major General Nguyen Quang Dam was sign the contract in June, while the deliveries would be completed in the following year. The JBT has designed the high-speed MS50s and has been delivered at the first order in 2015. The VCG has explained the aim of the new patrol boats order is for the maritime

²⁸ Franz-Stefan Gady, "Vietnam Buys Deadly New Missiles Capable of Hitting China," *The Diplomat*, April 30 2015, accessed December 9 2016, <http://thediplomat.com/>.

²⁹ Toan Dao, "Vietnam Coast Guard builds muscle with new vessels," *VN Express*, 2016, accessed December 13 2016, <http://e.vnexpress.net/>.

security along Vietnam's coast and river areas.³⁰ The new patrol boats of Vietnam were not only related to the order from the VPA to the shipbuilding company, yet also from the other states which is interested to help and give to Vietnam for several purposes. As the example, Vietnam has been received six patrol boats from Japan in August 2014 for patrol operations particularly in the SCS water to ward of China's maritime ambitions.³¹

Rocket Launcher Set-up

Vietnam has been moved the rocket launchers from the Vietnamese mainland to five bases that have been built by Vietnam around the Spratlys. The military analysts said this Vietnam's action is a part of its defensive action towards the disputed area of the SCS as well as an action to halt China's firm movements in the SCS. These rocket launchers predicted be able to strike military bases of China in the region. Although the rocket launchers have not be armed yet, but it can be operated soon as required.³²

These rocket launchers are believed as a part of Vietnam extra rocket artillery system acquired from Israel. These rocket launcher have abilities to attack multiple targets at once in a range of 150 kilometers and able to carry 150 kilograms warheads. The military analyst also said that the range of these rockets will be able to reach China's newly-built airstrips.³³

The Deputy Defense Minister of Vietnam, Senior Lieutenant General Nguyen Chi Vinh have told the media that any kind of Vietnam's action to move or set up any weapon in its territory are within their legitimate right as quoted on below quotation:

³⁰ Gordon Arthur, "Vietnam Coast Guard orders extra boats," *Shephard Media*, June 29 2016, accessed December 13 2016, <https://www.shephardmedia.com/>.

³¹ Arthur, "Vietnam Coast Guard orders extra boats."

³² Oliver Holmes, "Vietnam Sends Rocket Launchers to the South China Sea," *The Guardian*, 2016, accessed December 13 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/>.

³³ Liam Cochrane, "South China Sea: Vietnam moves rocket launchers to disputed Spratly Islands: report," *ABC Net*, 2016, accessed December 13 2016, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/>.

“It is within our legitimate right to self-defense and to move any of our weapons to any area at any time within our sovereign territory” (Vinh 2016)

This Vietnam’s action in moving and setting up the rocket launchers is designed to counter China’s build-up on its reclamation islands in the Spratlys archipelago. This action also becomes the most significant defensive move done by Vietnam in the SCS according to the military analysts.³⁴

Modernization Efforts of Vietnam’s Maritime Forces

Vietnam has emphasized gradual modernization of its arm forces. The priority of the defense modernization was set up during the Eleventh National Congress of the CPV in January 2011. The Secretary General of the CPV has delivered political report of armed forces modernization until 2015. There are major challenges of today’s situation therefore; it is needed to adapt to the current situation challenges by the modernization of the armed forces Vietnam has done gradual modernization of its maritime forces include the VPAN, the Vietnam Maritime Police, and the VNFSF. The concern of the modernization is related to the ongoing issues of the SCS dispute, particularly as a result of China’s ambitious action includes the Chinese oil drilling activity that reported fall into Vietnam’s water.³⁵

Vietnam People’s Army Navy

The Vietnam People’s Army Navy (VPAN) was established since 7th of May 1995. At that time the focus of this arm forces was for Soviet-donated fast attack craft for the operation of the riverine and coastal defense. Nowadays, the VPAN is one of the branch of the VPA which mainly focuses on the protection of Disputed water.³⁶

Vietnam had initiated to modernize the naval and air forces in dealing with the disputes over sovereignty with China in SCS. The modernization of the VPA Navy aimed to enhance the protection of the state’s territorial water. Compared to the past years, the number of the order of battle equipment increased in 2013. An estimated budget in 2009 counted that Vietnam has allocated as much as 1,8-2,1 bilion USD focusing on the development of the VPAN. The below table has shown us the significant naval equipment that have been modernize by the VPA navy in order to meet the requirements of the current issues and situations. As seen from the table, there are the raise numbers of the naval equipment as compared from 1990 with 2013. The main modernization particularly increased on the naval weapon such as submarines, landing craft, as well as others logistics and supports.³⁷

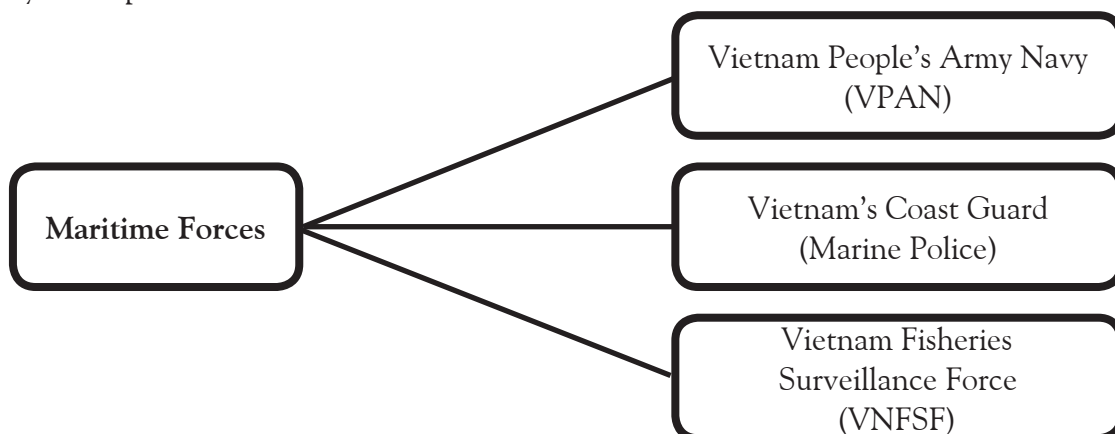


Figure 7. Vietnam’s Maritime Forces

³⁴ Cochrane, “South China Sea: Vietnam moves rocket launchers to disputed Spratly Islands: report.”

³⁵ Ministry of National Defense Socialist Republic of Vietnam, “Vietnam National Defense,” *The Defense White Paper of Vietnam*, (2009): 40.

³⁶ Carlyle A. Thayer, “Vietnam’s Maritime Forces,” *Presentation Conference on Recent Trends in the SCS and U.S. Policy Center for Strategic and International Studies*, (2014): 3.

³⁷ Thayer, “Vietnam’s Maritime Forces,” 4.

VPA Navy Order of Battle 1990	VPA Navy Order of Battle 2013
....	2 Varshavyanka-class submarines 2 Yugo-class SSI
8 Frigates	2 Frigates (FFGM) 6 Corvettes (FSG) 8 Tarantul-class PCFGM
52 PBCs, PBs, and PCMs	54 Patrol and Coastal Combatants
7 Amphibious ships	8 (5 LSMs and 3 LSTs)
6 Landing Craft	30 Landing Craft
11 Minesweepers	13 Mine Warfare and Countermeasures
....	29 Logistics and Support

Table 2. VPAN Modernization Equipment: comparison between 1990 and 2013

Source: Carlyle A. Thayer, "Vietnam's Maritime Forces," *Presentation Conference on Recent Trends in the SCS and U.S. Policy Center for Strategic and International Studies*, (2014): 3.

Vietnam's Coast Guard (Marine Police)

Vietnam's Coast Guard has been established since 1998, aims to exercise sovereign jurisdiction over Vietnam's maritime. The missions of the Vietnam's Coast Guard include the monitoring activities of human trafficking, drug smuggling, terrorism, search and rescue (SAR), toxic waste dumping, as well as monitoring of illegal operations by foreign fishing vessels.

Most of the Vietnam's patrol boats are built domestically, while the larger ships are made abroad yet with the involvement of Vietnam's local company as well. The consistent modernization of the Coast Guard can be seen in 2013. The Vietnam Coast Guard received three ex-South Korean Maritime Police patrol vessels in August. The following year 2014, National Assembly of Vietnam has given funds 706 thousands USD aims to enhance the Coast Guard and Vietnam Fishery Surveillance Force. One month after that, the Vietnam has announced that as much as 540 million USD would be given to the enhancement of Vietnam Coast Guard and Vietnam Fisheries

Surveillance Force. In the early 2015, Vietnam took delivery of decommissioned Japan Coast Guard Vessels which mark as a part of its Coast Guard modernization.³⁸

Vietnam Fisheries Surveillance Force (VNFSF)

In 2014, an estimation of 120.000 Vietnam's fishing vessels of all sizes in a place. In 2015, the Prime Minister of Vietnam Nguyen Tan Dung has given information that the government would spend as much as 200 million USD to the VNFSF for the development of the four large fisheries surveillance vessels, the KN-781 type designed by Netherlands. It equipped with advanced technology such as a helicopter deck. The modernization of the VNFSF comes up since the case of China's oil drilling within the Vietnam's water back in 2014. China has done the huge oil drilling platform of Hai Yang Shi You 981 which approximately falls within 80 kilometers of Vietnam's EEZ. At that moment, the drilling platform accompanied by other armada such as People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) warships. Two months later, the number of Chinese ships and vessels increased, particularly 7 warships deployed.

Those Chinese activities in the disputed water had become the concern of Vietnam's government. Concerning that issue, VNFSF boats has done daily operation along the Vietnam Coast Guard Vessels in confronting China's armada around the huge drilling rig. On June 2014 reported that the Chinese maritime force with forty Coast Guard ships, fourteen transport ships, twenty tugboats, forty-seven fishing boats, four PLAN warships, and five flying military jets were around the oil drilling area.

Since May 2014 to the present, Vietnam's Coast Guard together with VNFSF vessels has some efforts to confront the Chinese activities around the Vietnamese EEZ and order them to stop their activity and leave the disputed water. China has responded Vietnam's exclamation by

³⁸ Carlyle A. Thayer, "Vietnam's Maritime Forces," *Presentation Conference on Recent Trends in the SCS and U.S. Policy Center for Strategic and International Studies*, (2014): 12-13.

declaring an expansion to the exclusion zone around the drilling area. In June 2014 Vietnam's official reported that 24 Vietnam Coast Guard and VNFSF vessels had been damaged due to this incident.³⁹

Bilateral Defense Cooperation: Vietnam-United States Military Cooperation

Vietnam has indicated that they advocate expanding its defense diplomacy by participating in the security cooperation as well as defense cooperation with both regional and international community. Military cooperation between Hanoi and the Washington as the extra-regional actor that considered plays significant role in the South China Sea dispute will become the focus in this point.

Back in the history after the Vietnam's war, Vietnam and the U.S. had minimal relations until the mid 1990s remaining the North Vietnam's victory over the South Vietnam which backed by the U.S. at that time. In the 1995, diplomatic relations between Vietnam and the U.S. were established which brought both states to expand their relationships in many sectors include defense sector. In late 2013, the U.S. President Barack Obama established a comprehensive partnership with Vietnam include a framework to move the new phase of the U.S. and Vietnam relationships. A key factor that drives these two states cooperation in the South China Sea, particularly about China's increased assertiveness in the South China Sea.⁴⁰

China's assertive roles in the SCS, particularly on the oil drilling activities that fall within disputed water have led Vietnamese government to tighten and intensify the cooperation in the field of security and maritime in dealing with the issues. Taking the example, in late 2013 the U.S. provided Vietnam with as much as 18 million USD in assistance include handed fast patrol vessels to enhance

Vietnam's maritime and security capacity. This U.S. action towards Vietnam is consider as a part of the peaceful resolution to the SCS disputes according to Ted Osius, a nominee of U.S ambassador to Vietnam as stated on below quotation:⁴¹

"I think we should explore further expansion of Vietnam's maritime domain awareness and how we can help Vietnam build its capacity to deal with the challenges in the South China Sea."(Osius 2014)

The underlying reason of the relationships between the two countries is related to each own interest. As for the U.S., they are currently interests of having bilateral relationship with Vietnam. One of the U.S. national interests is related to the strengthening of the U.S. market in Vietnam. This interest is when related to the lifting military embargo to Vietnam. The U.S aims to enlarge its market by opening trade and investment in the field of military with Vietnam. The other interests of the U.S. are also to counter China's increasing regional influence, to cooperate to ensure freedom of navigation and operations in the disputed waterways, as well as to expand the U.S. rebalance policy in Southeast Asia.⁴²

While the national interest of Vietnam in having cooperation with the U.S. is related to the economic development as the underlying reason of Vietnam participated the South China Sea dispute. While the cooperation with the U.S. for Vietnam also as a counterweight to China's assertive actions in SCS. Many Vietnamese policymakers seek to counter Chinese ambitions in the South China Sea by "encouraging a sustained U.S. presence in the region and to boost its trade interests with the U.S."⁴³

³⁹ Thayer, "Vietnam's Maritime Forces," 14-16.

⁴⁰ Mark E. Manyin, "U.S.-Vietnam Relations in 2014: Current Issues and Implications for U.S. Policy," *Congressional Research Service*, (2014): 4.

⁴¹ Manyin, "U.S.-Vietnam Relations in 2014: Current Issues and Implications for U.S. Policy," 5.

⁴² Murray Hiebert and Phuong Nguyen, "A New Era in U.S.-Vietnam Relations," *A Report of the CSIS Summitro Chair for Southeast Asia Studies*, (2014): 6.

⁴³ Hiebert and Nguyen, "A New Era in U.S.-Vietnam Relations," 7.

U.S. Lifting Embargo on Lethal Arm Sales for Vietnam

The U.S. decided to fully lifting embargo on lethal arms sale to Vietnam in May 2016. The decision of the lifting embargo was directly informed by President Obama during his visit to Vietnam. The decision of lifting arms embargo according to the U.S. Defense Secretary Ash Carter will lead to the tightened ties between Washington and Hanoi, particularly the maritime cooperation in the disputed sea. Before this decision established, the U.S. and Vietnam had already try to normalized the diplomatic relations in 2011 memorandum of understanding which consists of five defense cooperation.⁴⁴

Even though the normalization effort of the U.S. with Vietnam had established several years ago, yet under President Obama's administration the relations between the two countries had improved significantly. The decision of the U.S. on lifting the embargo of lethal arm sales also as a part of the U.S. rebalances to the Asia-Pacific. Concerning this case, the U.S. and Vietnam both have own benefits. This will support the U.S. rebalance policy in the Asia Pacific, as well as support its freedom of navigation concerning the South China Sea dispute. For Vietnam, the lifting embargo on lethal arm sales will help Vietnam to improve the development and security particularly in the disputed waterways engagement, as well as to prevent China's aggressive actions in the SCS.⁴⁵

Though it was a part of U.S-Vietnam normalization, the lifting embargo will not immediately affect Vietnam's large military purchases. It will be a long journey until Vietnam finally purchase from the U.S. By considering current security situation, Vietnam would prefer on procuring surveillance related

to ensure its maritime security. Although still there were not a significant changes, yet Vietnam seen to improve surely. Since the decision of lifting embargo was not merely for Vietnam-U.S. benefits only but also for Vietnam-U.S. allies benefits as well, Vietnam could together improve the relations with the U.S. allies. As the example, in March 2016 Vietnam's international port facility at Cam Ranh Bay finally capable of receiving foreign aircraft carriers and submarines that seek maintenance as well as repair and refuel. Vietnam and Japan also reached agreement related to the port calls for Japanese vessels because of the lifting embargo by the U.S.⁴⁶

One of the consideration to purchase U.S. weapons is the price. The U.S. weapons still hard to compete with the other counterparts when it comes to the sales to Vietnam, but the U.S. itself has a program named Pentagon's Excess Defense Articles (EDA) which facilitate the other state to buy with cheaper price since the equipments are no longer needed by the U.S. but still eligible to be transferred to foreign states. Vietnam planned to buy F-16 fighter aircraft from this program which estimated only \$750 million for 24 units compared to buy from Russia \$450 million for 12 units, which makes Vietnam save as much as \$150 million. Vietnam seems to decrease its military purchase to Russia as Russia engaging a lot with China had closer to China's position in the South China Sea dispute rather to Vietnam.⁴⁷

Arms producers from U.S. allies such as Japan, South Korea, France, Germany, Britain, and Israel are also potential beneficiaries of the U.S. decision on lifting embargo. As the fact that Vietnam is trying to enlarge military purchases to Israel, one of U.S. allies. On July 2016 Vietnam ordered surface-to-air SPYDER-SR

⁴⁴ Bradley Peniston, "Wider US-Vietnam Military Relations," *Defense One*, May 23 2016, accessed December 15 2016, <http://www.defenseone.com/>.

⁴⁵ Prashanth Parameswaran, "US-Vietnam Defense Relations: Problems and Prospects," *The Diplomat*, May 27 2016, accessed December 15 2016, <http://thediplomat.com/2016/05/us-vietnam-defense-relations-problems-and-prospects/>.

⁴⁶ Cuong T. Nguyen, "What the end of the US arms embargo means for Vietnam," *East Asia Forum*, August 9 2016, accessed April 6 2017, <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2016/08/09/what-the-end-of-the-us-arms-embargo-means-for-vietnam/>

⁴⁷ Sigur Centre for Asian Studies, "How Lifting the U.S. Arms Embargo on Vietnam Matters." *The George Washington University Policy Brief*, (2016): 2-3.

air defence system to Rafael Advanced Defense Systems with assistance Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI). SPYDER reported is designed to operate in all weather warfare with fighting escalated and quickly shooting many targets at once. SPYDER also has ability to destroy aircraft types include fighters, helicopter, unmanned aircraft, cruise missiles and munitions.⁴⁸

Vietnam purchase to U.S. allies is a warming to Vietnam and part of Vietnam long term plan to buy U.S. military weapon in the future. The decision of U.S. military embargo is beneficial to U.S, Vietnam, and also U.S. allies, regardless of their respective objectives in this arm sales industries.

Conclusion

Vietnam has implemented its defense policy in the field of economy, military, politics, and technology in the disputed sea. In the field of economy, Vietnam has been allocated necessary portion of the state budget for the defense sector. Vietnam has become a state that pushes strong growth of the defense budget in the Southeast Asia. According to the Defense Minister of Vietnam, it has proven that Vietnam will concern on the modernization of its Navy to protect the country. It has true also that the most of Vietnam's defense budget were spent for maritime necessity. Military modernization in the maritime aspects has pushed Vietnam as China challenge grows.

In the field of military and technology, Vietnam has done several major military activities towards SCS. Building Reclamation Island, placed submarine-launched land attack missiles into those islands, purchasing more coast guard vessel for patrol, setting up rocket launcher in the islands, as well as doing modernization of its maritime forces are some Vietnam's crucial activities to counter China. In the field of politics, Vietnam has been enhancing its cooperation with the United

States in the terms of military. This cooperation is beneficial for both of them in achieving its own interests concerning the South China Sea dispute.

To conclude, building unilateral capability is more effective for Vietnam in order to encounter China's strategic position in the disputed waterways. Unilateral means that Vietnam should maximizes its self capabilities to achieve the goals. If building self capability seems not really work to encounter China's strategic position, building bilateral cooperation will help Vietnam to maximize its power. If its is necessary, multilateral cooperation also should be effective to support Vietnam in this context.

Unilaterally, Vietnam has tried to build economic capabilities as well as modernization of maritime forces. As for bilaterally, Vietnam has conducted military cooperation with the U.S. to attain their mutual and common benefits. For multilaterally, Vietnam should enhance its cooperation with the other ASEAN countries which has common interests with Vietnam in encountering China's strategic position in the South China Sea dispute.

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⁴⁸ Defence Blog, "Vietnam receives first Israeli-made SPYDER air defense missile system," *Defence Blog*, July 18 2016, accessed April 6 2017, <http://defence-blog.com/news/vietnam-receives-first-israeli-made-spyder-air-defense-missile-system.html>.

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