

# INDIA-VIETNAM STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP: ENGAGING WITH THE EMERGING REALITIES

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## INTRODUCTION

The India-Vietnam strategic partnership is based on the long historical and cultural linkages which date back to over 2,000 years. This bilateral relationship has no record of any painful past between the two nations. Rather, their suffering at the hands of external imperialist powers has led to a stronger partnership which would help shape the geo-political realignment being witnessed today. It is important to note that despite differences in their political ideologies and their systems of government, this relationship presents a unique case of being based on the commonality of principles between the two nations. Their shared history from ancient to modern times, along with mutual respect for each other, has ensured that the relationship remains organic in character. This is quite evident while studying the bilateral relations, starting in the post-independence era.

Even though their official diplomatic relations were established only on January 7, 1972, India supported Vietnam's anti-colonial movement for its independence. During the Cold War period, India supported Hanoi's "Four Points" for resolving the Vietnam conflict, while coming out strongly against

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the emergence of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO), which India considered as being directed against Vietnam. India also supported Vietnam during the Kampuchea crisis in the late 1970s. Further, the 'Open Door' reforms launched by Vietnam in 1986 and the 'Look East' policy announced by India in 1994, transformed both nations' foreign policies and provided opportunities to further strengthen their bilateral relations. These events, along with the evolution of India's external engagement, have helped shape Vietnam's perception of India as a reliable strategic partner which can help Hanoi in its regional strategic interests. The evolution of the bilateral partnership, based on India's and Vietnam's shared and sustained cooperation, has enabled the establishment of the strategic partnership in 2007, which was elevated to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) in September 2016, during the visit of India's prime minister to Vietnam. The establishment of the CSP indicates the prevailing level of mutual trust as well as the necessity for maintaining peace, stability, growth, and prosperity in the region.

Further, the India-Vietnam partnership would be crucial in the context of the emerging security challenges of the 21st century. For instance, both nations have underlined the importance of maintaining peace and stability, and peaceful resolution of disputes in accordance with international law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). On the South China Sea issue, both nations have underscored the need to fully and effectively implement the Declaration on the Conduct (DOC) of Parties in the East Vietnam Sea and the establishment of a Code of Conduct (COC) in the South China Sea. As India and Vietnam geographically lie at the heart of the emerging Indo-Pacific construct, both would play a major role in this strategic space which

is becoming a core theatre for competition for power and influence amongst the major powers. Through the further deepening of their bilateral strategic ties, based on their shared interests and principles, this partnership would play an important and constructive role towards a stable, inclusive, and prosperous region.

#### **A BRIEF BACKGROUND ON MODERN INDIA-VIETNAM RELATIONS**

In the 20th century, Jawaharlal Nehru and Ho Chi Minh laid a strong foundation for the future bilateral ties that also included expanding the scope of the partnership. India supported Vietnam's anti-colonial struggle for independence and then the reunification of the nation. Throughout the Vietnam War, India retained a deep emotional attachment to the Viet Minh led by Ho Chi Minh, whom Nehru had described as a part of Asian history. Nehru, in 1954, became the first foreign leader to visit the newly-independent North Vietnam. Despite certain setbacks to the relations in the 1960s—on account of the 1962 Sino-Indian tension and the Indo-Pak War of 1965—India's support for a one-Vietnam policy, as stated by Indian Foreign Minister Swaran Singh in the Lok Sabha on April 26, 1972, helped the bilateral ties acquire a firm new footing.<sup>1</sup>

During the Cold War, both nations often found themselves on the same side through their activities in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organisation, and so on. This proactive participation through various multilateral architectures showed the commonality of principles upheld by the two nations and this pushed both governments to further deepen their partnership.

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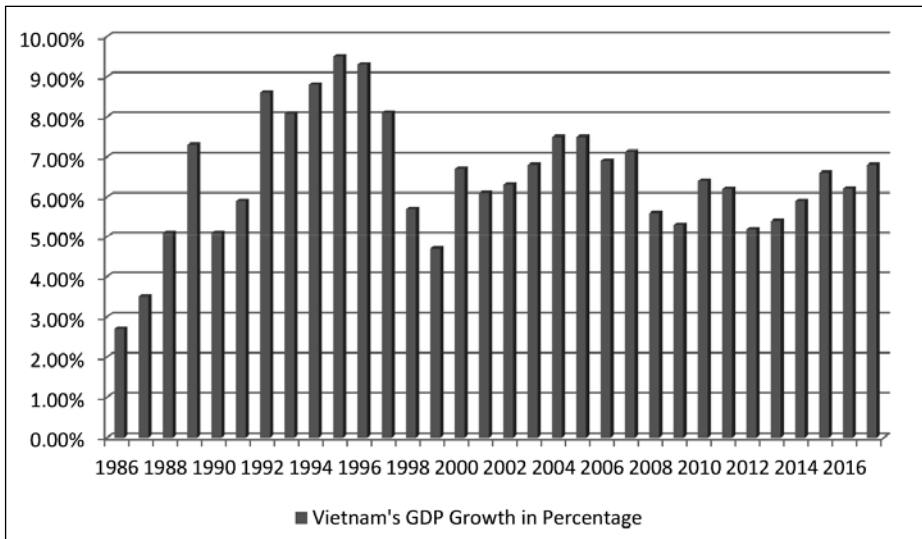
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1. Suranjan Das, Tridib Chakraborti, and Subhadeep Bhattacharya, *Indo-Vietnam Relations in the Emerging Global Order* (New Delhi: KW Publishers Pvt Ltd, 2018), pp. 9-16.

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1972, India and North Vietnam decided to upgrade their missions to the embassy level; this paved the way for closer contacts. The unification of North and South Vietnam in January 1976 into the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, led to a positive growth in the bilateral political, economic, and strategic cooperation. During the Kampuchean crisis, India supported Vietnam's Cambodian policy against China's backing of the Khmer Rouge regime.<sup>2</sup>

The 1980s was a period which witnessed increasing importance being placed on Southeast Asia in India's foreign policy discourse. During this period, Southeast Asia was emerging as a major economic powerhouse with which India sought to deepen its economic relations. It was during this period that Vietnam (in 1986) also launched its economic reform programme, termed the Doi Moi<sup>3</sup> initiative. The launch of this economic initiative, as indicated in Fig 1, helped propel Vietnam's economy. From a growth of 2.7 percent in 1986, Vietnam's economic reform helped push the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to an average of 6 percent growth that continues till today, and despite a slight decline during the Asian financial crisis in 1998, the growth has remained stable. This sustained and high economic growth witnessed in Vietnam has enabled its poverty level to fall from 75 percent three decades ago to roughly 9.8 percent in 2018.<sup>4</sup>

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2. G Jayachandra Reddy, "Ho Chi Minh: An Architect of India-Vietnam Freindship", in G Jayachandra Reddy, ed., *Vision of Ho Chi Minh: India-Vietnam Relations* (Tirupati: UGC Centre for Southeast Asian & Pacific Studies, 2017), pp. 10-11.
  3. Also known as the rejuvenation strategy, it led to the liberalisation of both the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors in order to develop market institutions and expand the role of the private sector. International integration was a key facet of the reform era.
  4. Das, et al., n. 1, pp. 25-28.

**Fig. 1: Vietnam's GDP Growth, 1986-2017 (in %)<sup>5</sup>**

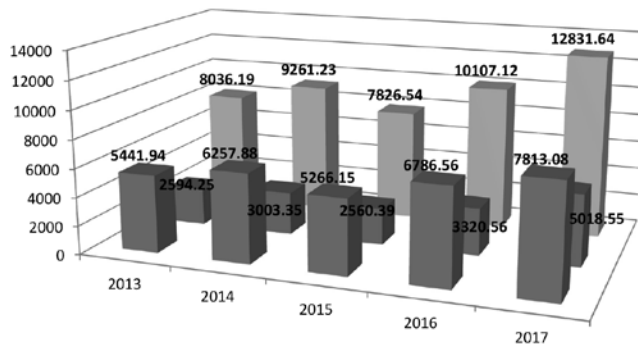
In the post-Cold War era, the fragility of the Indian economy at that time made India reexamine its policies with its eastern neighbours. The 'Look East' policy was first enunciated by former Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao during a lecture delivered by him on September 8, 1994, in Singapore titled, "India and the Asia-Pacific: Forging a New Relationship". The 'Look East' policy was intended to build India's relations with its eastern neighbours, starting with the nations in Southeast Asia that were presumed to be of great significance to India's economic and strategic interests. This policy had a strong undertone towards establishing, economically, a strong partnership with the fast and robust economies of Southeast Asia.

In terms of India-Vietnam economic relations, the launch of Vietnam's economic reforms programme in 1986, along with the liberalisation and economic reforms undertaken in India in the early 1990s, provided the perfect window towards strengthening the bilateral economic ties. In the years between 1992 and 2008, Indo-Vietnamese bilateral trade registered an average 20 percent rise

5. "Vietnam GDP Growth (annual %)", World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?end=2017&locations=VN&start=1985&view=chart>. Accessed on April 26, 2019.

per annum, increasing from US\$ 100 million in 1996 to US\$ 200 million at the end of 2000. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)-India Free Trade Agreement (FTA) signed in August 2009, and implemented on January 1, 2010, brought about further restructuring in the pattern of the bilateral trade. The signing of the ASEAN-India FTA brought in a more diversified India-Vietnam export-import basket that included rubber, computer hardware, electronic goods, equipment for hydropower projects, cold rolling steel, hydraulic power equipment, and so on.<sup>6</sup> The total volume of India-Vietnam bilateral trade was valued at close to US\$ 13 billion at the end of 2017, as indicated in Fig. 2. India's total trade with Vietnam has increased at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 23.1 percent over the past decade, growing from \$ 1.4 billion in 2007 to \$ 10 billion in 2016. India is a net exporter to Vietnam and its share in Vietnam's total international trade accounted for 2.2 percent in the year 2016.<sup>7</sup> At the end of June 2018, India was in the tenth position in terms of Vietnam's global imports and constituted 2.95 percent of its global share. In terms of Vietnam's total global exports, India was in the 25th position, constituting 0.58 percent of its global share.<sup>8</sup>

**Fig 2: India-Vietnam Bilateral Trade, 2013-17 (in US\$ million)<sup>9</sup>**



6. Das, et al., n. 1, pp. 25-28.  
 7. "Strengthening ASEAN-India Partnership: Trends and Future Prospects", EXIM Bank, India, January 2018, <https://www.eximbankindia.in/Assets/Dynamic/PDF/Publication-Resources/ResearchPapers/88file.pdf>. Accessed on April 19, 2019.  
 8. "Vietnam Major Trade Partners", June 2018, [http://countries.bridgat.com/Vietnam\\_Trade\\_Partners.html](http://countries.bridgat.com/Vietnam_Trade_Partners.html). Accessed on April 19, 2019.  
 9. "Vietnam, Export-Import Data", Department of Commerce, Government of India, 2018, <http://commerce-app.gov.in/eidb/iecmt.asp>. Accessed on January 18, 2019.

In the post-Cold War period, both India and Vietnam have enhanced their regional participation, after Vietnam was accepted as an ASEAN member state in 1995. Both nations began collaborating closely at the various ASEAN-led security fora such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) to which India was admitted in 1997, while Vietnam also strongly supported India's membership into the East Asia Summit (EAS) which was established in 2005. It is also important to mention that Vietnam was one of the few countries that supported India's nuclear test in 1998 and is also committed to support India's entry as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

Therefore, it is important to note that the economic reforms launched by Vietnam in 1986 and the 'Look East' policy announced by India in 1994, provided opportunities to further strengthen the bilateral relations. In December 1999, during his visit to India, Vietnamese President Tran Duc Luong stated that cooperation with India was of strategic and long-term importance. Further, during his visit to Vietnam, in 2001, Prime Minister (PM) A B Vajpayee stated that the relations were strategic relations. This strong and positive rhetoric led to the signing of a Joint Statement on a Comprehensive Cooperation Framework for the 21st Century and a Joint Statement on the Official Establishment of a Strategic Partnership in 2007 during the visit of Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung to India. Vietnam became the second Asia-Pacific state after Japan—and the first Southeast Asian country—to officially establish strategic relations with India. This strategic partnership helped facilitate the diversification of bilateral cooperation in the fields of economics, politics, culture, education, security, defence, science and technology, etc.<sup>10</sup>

The continued and increasing cooperation through the strategic partnership led to India-Vietnam relations getting elevated into a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) in September 2016 during the visit of PM Narendra Modi to Vietnam. The establishment of the CSP provides new areas for bilateral collaboration such as aerospace, biotechnology, chemical goods, automotive, renewable energy, and so on. The level of growth in the partnership between

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10. Tran Viet Phuong, "Milestones in Vietnam-India Strategic Partnership, 1972-2012", in Rajiv K Bhatia, Vijay Sakhuja, and Vikash Ranjan, eds, *India-Vietnam: Agenda for Strengthening Partnership* (New Delhi: Shipra Publications, 2013), pp. 15-16.

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India and Vietnam indicates the prevailing level of mutual trust as well as the necessity, given the new security challenges of the 21st century. In the post-Cold War period, strategic constructivism between India and Vietnam began to emerge as a major area of cooperation. Under the ambit of the strategic partnership, defence and security cooperation—including bilateral strategic dialogues on all aspects of regional security, high-tech military training and exchanges of defence information<sup>11</sup>—continues to be multi-faceted in its scope and intensity.

#### **THE EMERGING GEO-STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT SHAPING THE BILATERAL PARTNERSHIP**

Since the launch of the 'Look East' policy in 1994 and its upgradation to the 'Act East' policy in 2014, India has been engaging with Southeast Asia with a lot more vigour as the region falls in India's immediate strategic sphere. The physical distance between the Andaman Islands and Indonesia is a mere 195 km approximately. India also shares maritime borders with Myanmar and Thailand. Further, India shares a 1,643-km-long physical border with Myanmar. These maritime and physical borders that India shares with these three states link India geo-strategically to Southeast Asia. The changes following the end of the Cold War that witnessed the emergence of new centres of power, partnerships, and alliances, ensured that the old relations were reevaluated and reshaped. The new security environment in the post-Cold War and post 9/11 years did impact India's strategic thinking, wherein multipolarity in the region was considered best suited for maintaining the security, stability, and growth of the region. India's partnership with the ASEAN played a crucial role in forging its cooperation with the ASEAN member states. India was invited to become a sectoral partner of ASEAN in 1992 that helped promote trade, investment, and tourism relations. In 1995,

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11. Das, et al., n. 1, p. 49.



India was made a full dialogue partner that provided a broader agenda for cooperation, which also included the areas of security, and political cooperation.<sup>12</sup>

Vietnam has always been keen on India taking on a much larger security role in the region. In 1996, India became a member of the ARF with strong support from Vietnam. Through its membership in the ARF, India has been an active member, working with ASEAN in several areas, including search and rescue, sea piracy and disaster relief. The rising extremist violence in Southeast Asia—especially after 9/11—further heightened the issue of security and stability in the region. This set in motion the need for further expansion in the India-ASEAN security arrangements. India signed ASEAN’s Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) in October 2003. It also became a part of the ASEAN security dialogue initiatives such as the East Asia Summit established in 2005, with strong support from Vietnam, and the ASEAN Defence Ministerial Meeting Plus, established in 2010. Further, the establishment of the India-ASEAN strategic partnership in 2012 further enabled stronger cooperation in the area of security with ASEAN as well as with individual ASEAN states. At the ASEAN-India commemorative summit held in January 2018, there were deliberations to further expand the scope of India’s security partnership, with a focus on marine cooperation. Further, there was consensus on working collectively to combat the menace of terrorism as well as to counter radicalisation.<sup>13</sup>

It is important to note that India’s push towards strengthening its security ties with Southeast Asia was made possible as a consequence of the prevalence

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12. Ganganath Jha, *India and Southeast Asia: Introspection for Future Partnership* (Delhi: Anamika Publishers & Distributors Ltd, 2010), pp. 46-47.

13. “Transcript of Media Briefing on ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit, January 26, 2018”, Ministry of External Affairs, [http://mea.gov.in/media-briefings.htm?dtl%2F29399%2FTranscript\\_of\\_Media\\_Briefing\\_on\\_ASEANIndia\\_Commemorative\\_Summit\\_January\\_26\\_2018](http://mea.gov.in/media-briefings.htm?dtl%2F29399%2FTranscript_of_Media_Briefing_on_ASEANIndia_Commemorative_Summit_January_26_2018). Accessed on March 21, 2018.

of mutual trust as well as the commonality of interests between India and the member states of ASEAN. India, never an aggressor, and without any imperialistic record, was seen by nations in the region as a balancer and also a possible net security provider. In the post-Cold War period, the new security environment which led to India's growing engagement with ASEAN, also enabled India and Vietnam to strengthen their bilateral defence cooperation. It is fair to state that both nations began to deepen their strategic partnership, with defence emerging as a major area of cooperation. Further, Vietnam's defence policy lays out the 'Three No's'. These are No military alliances, No aligning with one country against another, and No foreign military bases on Vietnamese soil. Thus, both nations have commonality in terms of their military doctrines, which also helped in building this partnership.

The first Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on defence was signed in 1994, with a formal defence protocol being signed in March 2000 wherein both nations agreed for joint military exercises, joint campaigns on anti-piracy in the South China Sea, and anti-insurgency training. In 2003, a Joint Declaration was signed which binds both nations to conduct periodic high-ranking visits, including for expansion of cooperation in the defence and security spheres. The signing of the MoU on defence cooperation by the two defence ministers in November 2009 has helped sustain closer interaction between the two nations through regular defence dialogues, training, exercises, navy and coast guard ship visits, along with capacity building.<sup>14</sup> Since the establishment of the strategic partnership and the CSP there has been progress in the bilateral defence cooperation, including exchange of high-level visits to Vietnam by the Indian national security adviser (April 2015) and minister of defence (June 2016 and June 2018), and the visits to India by the Vietnamese minister of national defence (May 2015 and December 2016). In July 2018, India and Vietnam also held their first security dialogue. Apart from regular visits of high-ranking military delegations, the two countries have built ties on the procurement of weaponry and military

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14. P V Rao, "India and Vietnam: Forging a Durable Strategic Partnership", in Vijay Sakhuja, ed., *India-Vietnam Strategic Partnership: Exploring Vistas for Expanded Cooperation* (New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2011), pp. 152-153.

hardware, capacity building, collaboration in the area of warship building and repair. Further, both nations have signed an MoU on cyber security to enhance cooperation in the non-traditional security domain, along with enhancing cooperation in the areas of counter-terrorism, trans-national crimes, and disaster management and response.<sup>15</sup>

In terms of maritime cooperation, Indian ships have been regularly making friendly port calls to Vietnam. After then Indian Defence Minister, George Fernandes' official visit to Vietnam in March 2000, a number of Indian naval ships visited Vietnam and tested the future viability of strategic cooperation in the naval domain between the two countries. The Indian naval ship *INS-Rajput* undertook a goodwill visit to Ho Chi Minh city from September 28 to October 1, 2000. Since then, there have been regular visits by Indian naval as well as coast guard vessels to the ports in Ho Chi Minh and Da Nang cities of Vietnam. The evolving naval cooperation between India and Vietnam was further strengthened on account of India's announcement of its Maritime Doctrine in April 2004. In 2011, the Indian naval warships were granted permission to drop anchor at the Nha Trang port in Southern Vietnam. This Vietnamese gesture was of great significant due to the fact that the Indian Navy was the only foreign navy to have been granted such a privilege at a port, other than Halong Bay, near Hanoi. Further, in September 2011, both sides agreed that India would train Vietnamese personnel in submarine operations, mainly in intensive submarine and underwater warfare. With the expanding bilateral cooperation in the maritime sphere, both nations have also agreed to work closely to enhance cooperation in capacity building, technical assistance and information sharing for ensuring the security of the sea lanes, including combating piracy, preventing pollution and conducting search and rescue operations.<sup>16</sup>

In February 2016, for the very first time, a Vietnamese ship also participated in the International Fleet Review at Vishakhapatnam. The purpose of the

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15. "India-Vietnam Relations", Ministry of External Relations, September 2017, [https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Bilateral\\_Relations\\_Website\\_\\_Sept\\_17\\_.pdf](https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Bilateral_Relations_Website__Sept_17_.pdf). Accessed on April 18, 2019.

16. Tridib Chakraborti, "Rising India-Vietnam Ties in the Emerging Security Architecture of the Asia Pacific Region", in Bhatia, et al., eds, n. 10, pp. 114-118.

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cooperation between the two navies was for maintaining maritime order and safeguarding sea trade from threats such as piracy, terrorism, etc.<sup>17</sup> In 2018, three vessels from the Indian Navy arrived in the central Vietnamese city of Da Nang to commence their friendly visit from May 21-25. The three naval ships were led by Flag Officer Commanding the Eastern Fleet RAdm Dinesh Kumar Tripathi. The fleet, which docked at Tien sa port on May 21, included the frigate INS *Sahyadri*, fleet tanker INS *Shakti*, and anti-submarine stealth corvette INS *Kamorta*, along with 900 crew members. According to the Da Nang Department of Foreign Affairs, the visit was aimed at enhancing cooperation between the

two countries' naval forces, thus, contributing to the maintenance of security and stability in Southeast Asia and the world.<sup>18</sup>

During the visit of the former and late Vietnamese President Tran Dai Quang to New Delhi from March 2-4, 2018, the leader emphasised on the ongoing bilateral security cooperation which, according to him, would be crucial for maintaining peace, stability, growth, and prosperity in the entire region. In his meeting with PM Modi, he expressed his appreciation for India's contribution to the defence ties and support for Vietnam in United Nations peace-keeping operations. President Quang and PM Modi also underlined the importance of maintaining peace and stability, and peaceful solution of disputes, in accordance with international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS. They also underscored the need to fully and effectively implement the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the East Vietnam Sea

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17. Le Thi Hang Nga, "The East Sea Issue and its Impact on Vietnam-India Relations", in Reddy, ed., n. 2, p. 169.

18. Duy Khang, "Three Indian Naval Ships begin Friendly Visit to Da Nang", *Tuoi Tre News*, May 22, 2018, <https://tuoitrenews.vn/news/politics/20180522/three-indian-naval-ships-begin-friendly-visit-to-da-nang/45715.html>. Accessed on May 23, 2018.

and the establishment of a Code of Conduct for the maritime area.<sup>19</sup> In a reciprocal visit to Vietnam by India's President Ram Nath Kovind from November 18-20, 2018, both sides agreed to effectively implement the Joint Vision Statement on Vietnam–India Defence Cooperation for the period of 2015-20. They agreed to step up cooperation in human resources training, and promote collaboration between the army, air force, navy and coast guard of the two countries, as well as strengthen cooperation in other maritime domains, including anti-piracy, security of the sea lanes, exchange of white shipping, etc.<sup>20</sup>

**Vietnam's unease about China continues till today and this makes it push for strengthening its bilateral security partnership with nations such as India.**

#### **BUILDING THE BILATERAL STRATEGIC NARRATIVE: THE CHINA FACTOR**

The India-Vietnam strategic partnership needs to factor in the challenges from an increasingly assertive China in the region. Historically, Vietnam had an adverse relationship with China, having fought its last war with China in 1979. The Sino-Vietnamese relations have, since early 1990, matured into a normalised relationship, with China and Vietnam also establishing a comprehensive strategic partnership in March 2013. Over the years, Vietnam has built, through a series of agreements, close political, economic, military as well as cultural ties with China. Although Vietnam has been able to resolve most of its land border disputes with China, the mutual confidence between the two countries has not been fully restored.<sup>21</sup> Vietnam's unease about China continues till today and this makes it push for strengthening its bilateral security partnership with nations such as India. The line graph

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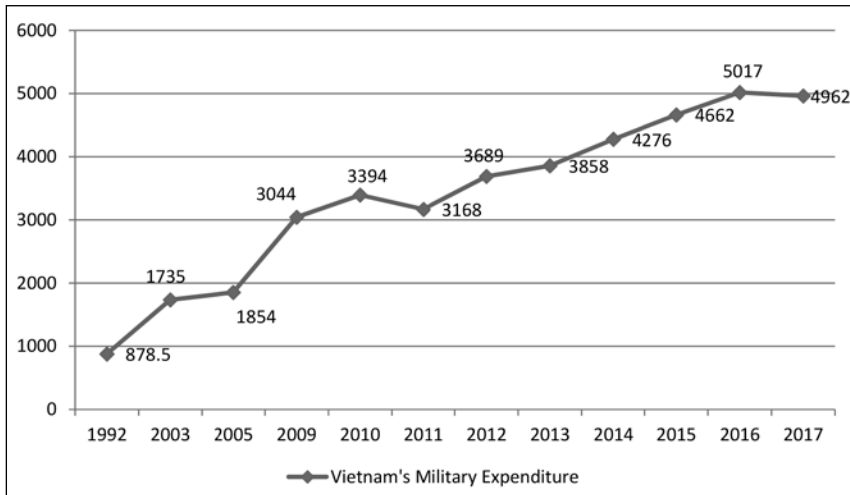
19. Duy Khang, "Vietnam, India Strive for \$15 bn Bilateral Trade Turnover by 2020", *Tuoi Tre News*, March 4, 2018, <https://tuoitrenews.vn/news/politics/20180304/vietnam-india-strive-for-15bn-bilateral-trade-turnover-by-2020/44351.html>. Accessed on March 5, 2018.

20. "India-Vietnam Joint Statement during State Visit of President to Vietnam", Ministry of External Relations, November 21, 2018, [https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/30615/IndiaVietnam\\_Joint\\_Statement\\_during\\_State\\_Visit\\_of\\_President\\_to\\_Vietnam](https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/30615/IndiaVietnam_Joint_Statement_during_State_Visit_of_President_to_Vietnam). Accessed on April 18, 2019.

21. Chakraborti, n. 16, pp. 104-105.

in Fig 3 indicates the military budget of Vietnam from 1992 to 2017. The trend as provided by the graph indicates a substantial increase in Vietnam's military budget.

**Fig. 3: Vietnam's Military Expenditure (in US\$ million)<sup>22</sup>**



Vietnam is increasing its military spending, especially on its navy, in tandem with its fast-growing economy and in response to the perceived threats, including from China. Over the last few years, China has increased its naval build-up in order to strengthen as well as protect its claims on the disputed South China Sea islands and reefs. This includes a massive construction of artificial islands in the Spratly Islands by increasing the area of landfills around them, with the intention of having military installations on them. According to James Hardy from *IHS Jane's Defence Weekly*, the Chinese infrastructure is explicitly military in nature; where it used to have a few small concrete platforms, it now has full islands with helipads, airstrips, harbours and facilities to support a large number of

22. "Military Expenditure by Country, in Constant (2016) US\$ million, SIPRI, [https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/1\\_Data%20for%20all%20countries%20from%201988%E2%80%932017%20in%20constant%20282016%29%20USD.pdf](https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/1_Data%20for%20all%20countries%20from%201988%E2%80%932017%20in%20constant%20282016%29%20USD.pdf). Accessed on November 27, 2018.

troops. Some US officials have also suggested that China could use the new infrastructure to help enforce an Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) similar to the one it established in late 2013 over much of the East China Sea. In the near term, the infrastructure is likely to be used to enhance radar coverage of the area, support a small presence of military personnel and provide logistic support for ships patrolling the farther reaches of the South China Sea.<sup>23</sup>

Since the tension between Vietnam and China over the Paracel and Spratly Islands in the South China Sea has intensified, there has been a further surge in Vietnam's military expenditure. The major dispute between China and Vietnam in the South China Sea is over the Paracel and Spratly Islands. The contention over the Paracel Islands is a bilateral dispute between Vietnam and China, while the dispute over the Spratlys includes five Southeast Asian nations, Taiwan and China. China stakes its claim over these islands and reefs in the South China Sea as they lie inside its self-declared maritime boundary—the 'nine-dash line'—as depicted in Fig 4. Based on China's claim, the Paracel and Spratly Islands fall well within China's maritime boundary. This claim was, however, struck down by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in July 2016 as being baseless and the judgement did not grant any historical rights over these disputed reefs/islands to China; China, of course, rejected the judgement. The issue between Vietnam and China over the Paracel Islands has been intense, with military engagement between the naval forces of China and South Vietnam taking place in January 1974. While today, Vietnam has normalised its relations with Beijing, which is also its leading trading partner, Hanoi remains one of the most strident voices in Southeast Asia to speak out against China's unilateral actions in the South China Sea.<sup>24</sup>

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23. Jeremy Page and Julian E. Barnes, "China Expands Island Construction in Disputed South China Sea", *The Wall Street Journal*, February 18, 2016, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/china-expands-island-construction-in-disputed-south-china-sea-1424290852>. Accessed on December 9, 2016.

24. John Reed, "South China Sea: Fishing on the Frontline of Beijing's Ambitions", *Financial Times*, January 24, 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/fead89da-1a4e-11e9-9e64-d150b3105d21>. Accessed on May 1, 2019.

**Fig. 4: China's Maritime Boundary in the South China Sea Depicted through the 'Nine Dash Line'<sup>25</sup>**



The issue over the South China Sea is one of the biggest challenges for Vietnam's foreign policy in terms of security and defence. This has led to Vietnam adopting a more pragmatic approach in its foreign policy based on multilateralisation and diversification. Through this, Vietnam not only promotes its relations with India, but is also strengthening its relations with other major countries in the region such as Japan, South Korea, Russia, as well as China. However, it is also important to note that by signing a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) with India in 2016, Vietnam has made India the third country, besides Russia and China, with which it has entered into a CSP. It should be emphasised that though China may be an important factor in Vietnam's and India's strategic thinking, it is not the only factor that is shaping the India-Vietnam comprehensive strategic

25. Ibid.



partnership. While China's increasing assertiveness in the disputed South China Sea raises concerns, its increasing penetration into South Asia and the Indian Ocean region also concerns India. However, it must also be taken into account that the India-Vietnam partnership has been built on a strong foundation of trust and shared principles that seeks the maintenance of peace and stability in the region as well as in the larger Indo-Pacific region.<sup>26</sup>

**Fig. 5: India and Vietnam in the Indo-Pacific Region**

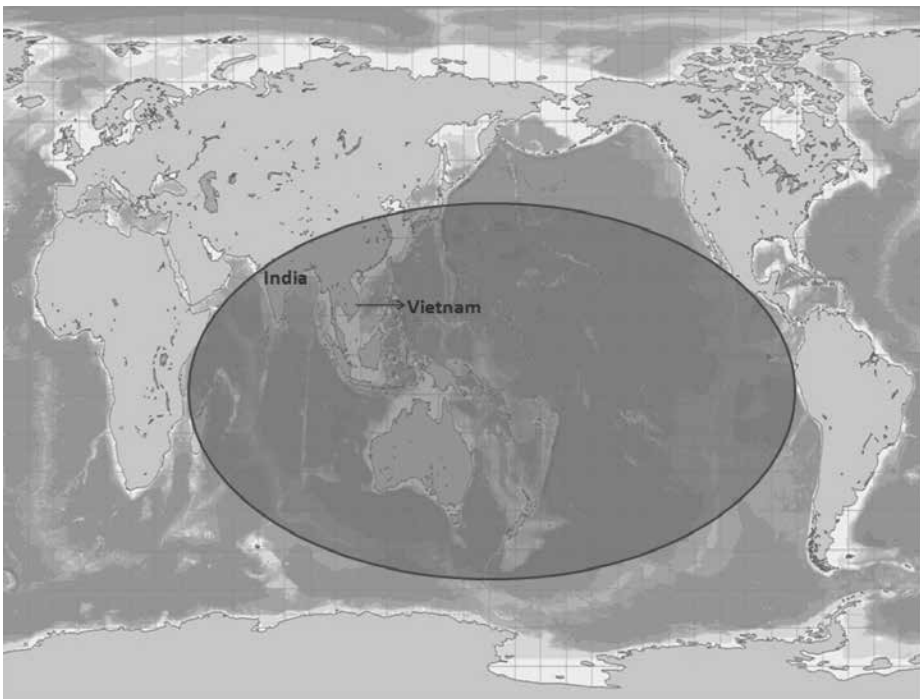


Fig 5 indicates the map of the Indo-Pacific region. As India and Vietnam geographically lie at the heart of the emerging Indo-Pacific construct, both would play a major role in this strategic space which is becoming a core theatre for competition, power and influence amongst the major powers. Through the further deepening of their bilateral strategic ties, based on their shared interests and principles, this partnership would play an important and

26. Le Thi Hang Nga, "The East Sea Issue and its Impact on Vietnam-India Relations", in Reddy, ed., n. 2, pp. 164-165.

**Since the 1976 reunification of North and South Vietnam at the end of the war, India and Vietnam have continued to draw closer, including on the Non-Aligned Movement's principles, and pursued new areas of cooperation. One of the major areas of cooperation between the two nations has been Science and Technology (S&T).**

constructive role towards a stable, inclusive, and prosperous region.

**BROADENING THE BILATERAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

While India and Vietnam, since independence, have been successful in addressing the challenges of mass poverty and underdevelopment, there still remains much to be done, given that today the global economy has slowed down, with increasing pressure against multilateral trading regimes. In this emerging global uncertainty, cooperation between India and Vietnam in the field of science and technology would help address the challenge of production inefficiency and the creation of new products geared towards the domestic as well as new markets. Through the establishment of the India-Vietnam comprehensive strategic partnership, new areas for bilateral collaboration in the aerospace, biotechnology, chemical goods, automotive, renewable energy, etc. domains have been provided.

Since the 1976 reunification of North and South Vietnam at the end of the war, India and Vietnam have continued to draw closer, including on the Non-Aligned Movement's principles, and pursued new areas of cooperation. One of the major areas of cooperation between the two nations has been Science and Technology (S&T). In 1978, an Agreement on Bilateral Cooperation in S&T was signed between the two countries. Over the course of the years that followed, there have been thirteen joint ventures. These include information technology, agriculture, animal husbandry, industry, remote sensing and environmental protection. After a decade of the renovation programme in Vietnam through its 'Doi Moi' initiative of 1986, and India in the 1990s emerging as a software superpower, an opportunity was provided for both

countries to develop cooperation in the fields of science, Information Technology (IT) and human resource development. On August 12, 1999, both countries concluded a formal Protocol on Cooperation on Information Technology, with a Centre for Development of Advance Computing (C-DAC) for research and development in high performance computing being set up at the Vietnam-India Advanced Resource Centre on Information and Communication Technology (ICT), in Hanoi. In May 2003, during the visit to India by the General Secretary of Vietnam's Communist Party, Nong Duc Manh, a joint declaration on a Comprehensive Cooperation Framework was signed between the two countries. On October 18, 2004, 'A Plan of Action for 2004-06' was worked out to speed up the implementation of the various agreements in the areas of economics, science and technology, information technology, health, education and human resource development assistance and culture. During the visit of Vietnam Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung to India from July 4-6, 2007, the signing of the joint declaration establishing a bilateral strategic partnership also enhanced cooperation in the fields of power, fisheries and aquaculture, agriculture, culture, education and training.<sup>27</sup>

On August 18, 2010, Vietnam's Ministry of S&T and India's Department of S&T extended full support for the joint research projects of the India-Vietnam programme of cooperation in S&T. This financial support was extended in the areas of biotechnology, bio-informatics, material science, oceanography, meteorology, medicine, pharmaceuticals, and non-conventional energy. In September 2016, India and Vietnam also signed an agreement for collaboration in the realm of exploration of outer space for peaceful purposes.<sup>28</sup>

**India and Vietnam can continue to enhance their cooperation in the field of science and technology which would be crucial towards addressing the emerging security challenges. It should be noted that areas of cooperation in high technology become complex at times.**

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27. K. Raja Reddy, "India-Vietnam Relations: Enhanced Cooperation in IT, Science and Technology", in Bhatia, et al., eds, n. 10, pp. 168-169 and 172-173.

28. Das, et al., eds, n. 1, pp. 9, 34-35 and 40-42.

India and Vietnam can continue to enhance their cooperation in the field of science and technology which would be crucial towards addressing the emerging security challenges. It should be noted that areas of cooperation in high technology become complex at times. It has often been argued that despite the growth in India-Vietnam cooperation in terms of defence and science and technology, there have been no transfers of technology by India, as all high technologies are usually dualist in nature, with both civilian and military applications. Further, collaboration in terms of missile technologies becomes complex in case it involves a third party. For instance, in principle, India has agreed to sell the BrahMos missile to Vietnam and the negotiations are still going on. This process seems a little complex since the BrahMos missile is a product of the joint venture between India and Russia, with over 60 percent of its components being imported from Russia. India has offered the sale of the Akash missile which has an intercept range of 25 km and its sale would be easier because 96 percent of the system is indigenous.<sup>29</sup> Meanwhile, other fields such as biotechnology, agriculture, new materials, nanotechnology, and space technology—including research and design of satellites, remote sensing technology for disaster forecast, environmental protection, and so on—fit well under the ambit of the bilateral comprehensive strategic partnership and pose a lower degree of complication.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, while deepening their bilateral defence and other strategic cooperation, it is essential for both countries to understand each other's core interests as well as limitations in order to find meaningful substance in the bilateral partnership.

While building their partnership in the field of S&T, it is worth noting that this also provides huge opportunities for India. For instance, given that Vietnam is ranked 8th in the 50 most attractive countries for software outsourcing, and also being in the top ten leading locations for offshore services in the Asia-Pacific region, it provides a huge opportunity in the area of ICT for India. ICT businesses in Vietnam receive strong support from the government in the form of training, research and development, land

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29. Le Thi Hang Nga, "The East Sea Issue and its Impact on Vietnam-India Relations", in Reddy, ed., n.2, p. 170.

30. Pham Hoang Ha, "India's Potential in Science and Technology: Scope for Cooperation", in Bhatia, et al., n. 10, p. 182.

leasing, infrastructure development and tax incentives. Further, Vietnam's high demand market—along with the fact that 60 percent of its population is in the productive age of 17 to 60 years—makes investment by Indian IT companies a very profitable proposition.<sup>31</sup> The cooperation between India and Vietnam in the field of S&T and IT has grown to such a level that during the working session with the Vietnamese delegation led by Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Thien Nhan on March 28, 2012, the then Minister of Science and Technology Vilasrao Deshmukh, observed that S&T has emerged as one of the strongest pillars of support for bilateral strategic cooperation.<sup>32</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The traditional relationship between India and Vietnam has helped in the building of a strategic partnership between the two nations. It needs to be mentioned that this relationship has grown and is sustained based on the historical ties between the two nations which have no record of any instance of imperialistic design or aggression being carried out by the two nations against each other. While it is true that Vietnam shared a strategic partnership with all of the five permanent (P-5) members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC)—along with a comprehensive strategic partnership with two of the P-5 members, namely China and Russia—it needs to be remembered that unlike India, Vietnam has witnessed a painful past with four of the five UNSC permanent members. Further, the current level of the India-Vietnam partnership is possible on account of the shared ideals, along with emerging convergence in their strategic interests. India-Vietnam relations have moved closer not only on account of their history, shared principles, and interests, but also on account of the emerging global environment that requires multiple powers to band together. The matrix of this complex security necessity arising from the traditional as well as non-traditional security threats has also helped broaden the scope of the bilateral strategic partnership.

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31. Tran Quy Nam, "ICT Industry in Vietnam: Opportunities for Cooperation with India", Bhatia, et al., eds., n. 10, pp. 184-185 and 189-190.

32. K. Raja Reddy, "India-Vietnam Relations: Enhanced Cooperation in IT, Science and Technology", in Bhatia, et al., eds, n. 10, p. 174.

**India-Vietnam bilateral partnership has to look beyond the challenges from just China to include common challenges posed by economic, social, and other forms of traditional and non-traditional security threats. Collaboration in the area of science and technology would help address the broader issues of security that include the social, economic, environmental, and so on.**

Despite China remaining ever present in both nations' strategic thinking, it is important to understand that the relations between Vietnam and China, or between India and China would not be disrupted on account of certain issues of divergence. For instance, on the issue over the Paracel Islands in the South China Sea, Vietnam has maintained that it is a bilateral dispute and does not seek third party intervention. However, while continuing to remain the most vocal amongst the Southeast Asian nations against the growing Chinese assertiveness in the disputed South China Sea, Vietnam calls for the maintenance of an environment of peace, stability, cooperation, and development in the South

China Sea, while for India and China, there is a constant effort on the part of the top leaderships in New Delhi and Beijing respectively to engage in, and carry out, dialogues in order to reduce tensions. The Wuhan Summit, which was the first ever informal summit that India has had with any other country, was testimony to that.

Therefore, the India-Vietnam bilateral partnership has to look beyond the challenges from just China to include common challenges posed by economic, social, and other forms of traditional and non-traditional security threats. Collaboration in the area of science and technology would help address the broader issues of security that include the social, economic, environmental, and so on. While doing so, it is essential to not only partner for capacity but also capability building. Today, both India and Vietnam have come a long way and have acquired knowhow and capabilities that have enabled both nations to cooperate at a much higher and more sophisticated level, e.g. Vietnam's capability in developing naval warships as well as its emergence

as the fifth largest ship builder globally. Further, as India seeks to develop its ports as well as its inland waterway through the Sagarmala project, Vietnam would become a suitable partner. Therefore, the comprehensive strategic partnership provides a huge opportunity for both India and Vietnam to deepen as well as widen the scope of their cooperation. While there already is a strong basis for the India-Vietnam partnership rooted in their past and modern history, it is also necessary that both sides address each other's concerns while taking care of the various compulsions arising out of the emerging security challenges.