



***Vietnam's strategy in the context of  
US-China competition***

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## **I. Introduction**

In recent years, the US-China competition in the Indo-Pacific region has been one of the focuses of the attention of international observers. In particular, the increase in strategic competition between these two countries in the field of security - politics has strongly affected countries in the region, including Vietnam. In recent years, the great powers have adjusted geo-economic and geo-political strategies based on their interests and goals in the face of rapid changes in the world situation. These adjustments have affected the small and medium powers. The strategic adjustment of the great powers leads to fierce competition between them at the regional level as well as on the global scale, notably the geostrategic competition between the US and China. US-China competition is increasing in the Indo-Pacific region in terms of politics, military, and economy. Small and middle powers have to make decisions to cope with this competition. Vietnam is no exception in this context. The main question in this thesis is: How does Vietnam manage its political interests in the context of the growing US-Sino competition in the Indo-Pacific? To answer this question, the paper will focus on understanding the national interests and policies of Vietnam, the US, and China, thereby identifying the challenges, opportunities, and benefits of Vietnam in the Indo-Pacific region. Then propose a suitable strategy for Vietnam to maximize Vietnam's national interests in the context of US-China regional competition.

The first part of the thesis will evaluate the power status of Vietnam by searching and synthesizing the definitions of small and middle powers that have been provided by scholars. From there, this paper will give a new definition of the above types of power by synthesizing the similarities between the available proven definitions. The paper then present the types of strategies used by small and middle powers countries today. These strategies include Balancing, Hedging, and Bandwagoning. The establishment of definitions of small and medium power and the introduction of the theory of the types of strategies will serve as the theoretical framework for the paper to position the power of Vietnam and come up with an appropriate strategy for Vietnam to the context of US-China competition in the Indo-Pacific region. The next part of the thesis will focus on studying the history of foreign policies of the US, China, and Vietnam to understand the core national strategic interests of these countries. Core national interests are interests that countries consistently pursue over a long time. By understanding that, the study will identify the goals, interests, and challenges of these countries in the Indo-Pacific region. Finally, based on the interests, goals, and challenges of the US, China, and Vietnam, along with

the theoretical basis, the study determines that the hedging strategy is appropriate for the case of Vietnam in the context of Vietnam. US-China competition in the Indo-Pacific region.

Being able to produce results for the research question is necessary because, at present, countries around the world are heavily affected by power competition, geopolitics, and geoeconomics between great powers. Through determining the power position of a country, understanding the national interests, and challenges of states, thereby making appropriate strategies for non-powerful countries, taking Vietnam as a case study. The research paper hopes to be a strategic reference for small and medium power countries, helping governments to come up with appropriate strategies for their national cases. In addition, the research paper hopes to be a scientific reference document that contributes to research projects in similar fields in the future.

The thesis will employ historical analysis and archival research. Contrary to other methods such as surveys and interviews, historical analysis and archival research are unobtrusive methods that involve the use of non-reactive sources, independent of the researcher's presence, and include documentary evidence, physical evidence, and archival analysis. Political documents are some of the most frequently used unobtrusive measures and include a wide variety of organizational and institutional documents and provide a broad array of political, legal, and financial records that can help researchers answer their research questions. There are several types of political documents. Also, Government white papers and legislative documents are important sources for policy research. The paper will undoubtedly consider the US, Chinese and Vietnamese national security strategies. Media sources, such as Newspapers, magazines, television, and radio, will be used. Equally important, Historical Records offer information and insight into most aspects of social history (including political and business history). Historical records rely on archives. The qualitative method of this thesis may lead to concerns about inaccuracies due to the selection of documents for research. To minimize these biases, the primary source of the research material for this study is the official documents of the Vietnamese, US, and Chinese governments. The author avoids the use of dubious references to their origin and authenticity. Considerations that the author has difficulty identifying the source will also not be used in this thesis.

## **II. Literature Review**

There is still no consensus on the definition of small and medium power in the political and academic literature. More precisely, in contrast to the less controversial definition of great power, the definition of small and medium powers remains controversial in academia, as

authors diverge in their conceptualization and definition. Determining whether a state is a small or medium power is necessary because it allows us to determine which strategies the different types of states espouse in dealing with international challenges. Especially in the context of the competition between China and the United States in the Indo-Pacific small and medium size countries, including Vietnam, need to consider the strategies to deal with the emerging challenges. To be able to develop appropriate strategies for countries (including Vietnam) in this case, it is necessary to consider a factor. That is necessary to have a theoretical framework to clearly define the strategies employed by small or medium powers. The aforementioned theoretical foundations will serve as the thesis' analytical framework for the following sections. This section identifies the main characteristics of small and medium powers. It will establish general definitions of small and middle powers by evaluating and comparing definitions previously articulated by scholars and by developing a definition based on the most frequently cited points. In other words, this section will provide definitions of small and middle powers. In the context of competition between two great powers, it will also identify the strategies of small and medium-sized powers later in this section.

### **Defining Small Powers**

Many scholars define small powers in different ways. Radoman (2018) has suggested that there are two groups of definitions for small powers: absolute and relative definitions. Absolute definitions rate a power as small by "*defining thresholds of material and human power that have to be reached if a state is not to be defined as small*" (Radoman, 2018, pp.181). The author cites Vital's classification as an example that a state considers a small power when it has a strong economy with a population of 10 to 15 million people, or a population of 20 to 30 million for an underdeveloped state. Relative definitions consider a state of being a minor power as much as its impact on the international arena. Countries are said to be small power when their leaders perceive themselves as small, incapable of defending themselves, and incapable of influencing the international system. This is the definition agreed by many scholars mentioned in Radoman's article, including Rothstein (1968), Keohane (1969), Krause and Singer (2001), and Hey (2003). In addition, Radoman also mentioned characteristics of the behavior of small powers that are states with weak security power. This leads to the power of these states in the international arena based on their foreign policy. Small powers seek recognition from the great powers by sharing in maintaining peace and stability, such as using the military to participate in search and rescue operations and taking the lead in environmental protection work. Small

powers are also incapable of threatening, destroying, or changing international institutions. In addition, powers are incapable of participating in power politics, so the same power often acts ethically in international affairs (Radoman, 2018).

Jesse and Dreyer (2016) list two definitions of a small power that are similar to Radoman's, providing two ways of determining it in absolute terms and the other way comparing the size and strength of small countries and other countries. Based on absolute numbers, a state is usually considered a small power when this state has a small land area, small population, low economic activity, and small military capacity. However, Jesse and Dreyer (2016) disagree with this definition of small power because it is not generally applicable, and the accuracy relative. The second definition of small powers that they see themselves as small powers. They are also weak in ability, and this characteristic is permanent. These countries must seek outside help.

According to Godfrey Baldacchino and Anders Wivel (2020), the debate over the definition of small powers has dragged on without resolution for fifty years. This creates a fertile environment for International Relations scholars to investigate the topic. Baldacchino and Wivel provide a list of definitions of small power and an analysis of the problems associated with these definitions. They contend that small powers are those states that are subject to the rule of law and have limited (international) political space or that do not possess nuclear weapons or aircraft carriers. Those are imprecise and lumped together in both medium and small power. They also argue that using weak military capabilities to shape a small power is not a standard measure. Baldacchino and Wivel (2020) conclude that a small state is a sovereign state with limited political capacity and that small states must comply with regional policies and are vulnerable to external shocks. In other words, the capacity and capability of the public administration, politics, and economy of small nations are utterly constrained.

Defining a state as a small power equal to population is again disagreed with by Michael Handel (2016) when he argues that population size is not an adequate criterion in defining a state as small power. He also mentions non-quantitative definitions of small power. The characteristics of small powers, unlike great powers, are focused not on military might but on self-defense because small powers are often preoccupied with their survival. More precisely, small powers have difficulty protecting themselves against external agents since *“a Small Power is a state which recognizes that it cannot obtain security primarily by use of its own capabilities, and that it must rely fundamentally on the aid of other states, institutions, processes, or developments to do so; the Small Power’s belief in its inability to rely on its own means must*

*also be recognized by the other states involved in international politics*” (Handel, 2016, p.36). Accordingly, small powers are states that lack international power and cannot achieve (or have to give up) their political goals and can only adopt defensive strategies to survive (Idem). Scholars have mentioned two ways of defining small power: absolute data-based and non-quantitative definitions. However, most of the scholars mentioned above emphasize non-quantitative definitions. Therefore, we provide a definition based on the most widely agreed characteristics of a small power, which is a state that perceives itself as a small power when it is incapable of self-reliance to protect against security threats. It has limited political, economic, and administrative capacity and has to rely on outside support. Small powers are incapable of influencing the great powers and international politics.

### **Defining Middle Powers**

Similar to the definition of a small power, the definition of a middle power is a topic of interest for many academics and a source of considerable debate. Quantitative definitions are also included in determining whether a state is a middle power. For example, Vellut defines a state as a middle power if it possesses a population of no less than 50 million or a Gross National Product (GNP) no less than \$10 billion (as of 1958) (Handel, 2016, p.24). However, this is contested by Handel. The author provides examples of European countries in 1970, including Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary, with GNPs of \$11.1 billion, \$32.9 billion, and \$15.3 billion, respectively. It is easy to see that these three countries achieve the level of GNP to be classified as middle powers. However, these states are not able to protect themselves and have to depend on other states, which also perceive themselves as minor powers. Similar to Vellut's population criterion, underdeveloped states with large populations cannot be classified as middle powers. Therefore, quantitative criteria cannot determine which state is middle power. Some other definitions of a middle power emphasize the fact that they cannot act effectively alone, but can have systemic effects within a group or through institutions. Middle power can influence the international system when this power's military and economic capabilities can partly impact the region, and the middle powers can impact the world through international organizations and institutions. The behavior of middle powers will be taken into account by the great powers in important decisions. However, these definitions are rejected because they did not meet future stability (Handel, 2016).

Jeffrey Robertson (2017) describes and analyses several definitions of middle powers. He believes that inherent definitions such as the definition of middle countries based on

quantification, according to the World Bank (2016) income of US\$1,026-12,475 as a middle state, can be misleading. Linguistic definitions also do not reflect the nature of middle powers. Therefore, he believes that an academic perspective provides the most accurate definition of a middle power. Robertson (2017) references a variety of scholarly formulas to define a middle power, including: assessment based on capacity, foreign policy, geographical location, norms, and behaviour. Accordingly, he describes three approaches to the middle power model: functional, capability, and behaviour. Specifically, a functional middle power is able to exert influence and assume certain roles in the international arena; it has an average capacity consisting of military and economic capacity that can defend itself but cannot resist great power attacks; it exhibits distinctive behaviour, pursues multilateral relations, manages conflicts effectively, and is ethical. Sharing a similar view, David A. Cooper (2013) argues that the definition of middle powers should not be based on inherent factors such as the evaluation of the proportion of the economy, the military, and the population because they are inconsistent, disorganised and inaccurate. The author argues that middle powers frequently pursue multilateral diplomacy, seek alliances, balance national interests, and seek opportunities to exert influence in the international arena. Middle powers frequently serve as mediators, resolving problems in a manner that compromises acceptable interests. They can also utilise multilateralism to play a crucial role in global coordination (Cooper, 2013). The lack of consensus among scholars on measuring a country's so-called middle power makes it difficult to agree on an exact definition of middle power. Global affairs change more rapidly than theories of international relations, so previous theories may no longer be applicable to contemporary world politics. Middle powers are interconnected communities. While small powers are only autonomous, sovereignty exists, middle powers have not only sovereignty but also the ability to exert influence over international and the great powers (via institutions and capability of military and economy) - this can be the important distinction between a small power and a medium power; the middle powers are able to maintain their position in the international arena, whereas the small powers are unable to. In addition, middle powers have the ability to exercise restraint, be moderate, limit their influence, and wait for external opportunities. Abbondanza (2020) identifies middle powers based on capacity, behaviour (proportion of multilateral cooperation), normative (compliance with international rules), identity (self-identification as a middle power), and influence (impact on the world political system). In contrast to the above-mentioned scholars, however, Abbondanza mentioned inherent factors that he believed were capable of defining a middle nation, namely its



geographical location and level of development, economy, modernisation. The difficulty of determining whether a state is considered a middle power is based on its ability and behavior. Specifically, middle powers serve as mediators in competition, active foreign policy, maintaining peace and reconciliation, and promoting international understanding via their capacity, as mentioned above. The middle nations are large and wealthy enough to attract the great powers but not robust enough to withstand their aggression. Carsten Holbraad (1971) explains why middle nations have the aforementioned characteristics by highlighting the benefits that come from implementing the aforementioned behaviours and capabilities. The characteristics of capacity and behaviour that are the primary determinants of a middle nation are mentioned again. Matthew (2013) provides a concise and clear definition of a middle power. The behavioural traits of a middle nation are average. The resources of the middle powers cannot be ignored, but they cannot win the attacks of the great powers. He also conceded that defining middle power by the qualitative method cannot produce clear distinctions between middle and small power. (Stephen, 2013). Middle powers have medium-range military and economic capabilities, sufficient autonomy in relations with great powers, and are committed to order and security in relations with great powers. The middle powers are also interested in a stable and quiet environment. This is also the condition for the middle powers to pursue their goals (Cox, 1989). However, non-qualitative approaches still have problems as national self-identification as the middle power among leaders does not provide a stable basis for determining inclusion status. Alternatively, how to define a middle power based on their behavior is also unstable. Because not all countries having behaviors such as alliance building or multilateral promotion that can be assessed as a middle power. When small powers or great powers can still take these actions but for the purposes to which these powers are directed. (Edström and Westberg, 2020, pp.174).

Similarly to the definition of small countries, I synthesize the arguments of the authors regarding the definition of a middle power and provide my definition of a middle power. Accordingly, middle powers are those with sufficient capacity to influence the international system but not enough capacity to resist the influence of great powers. These powers always promote pluralism, mediating agreement, and advocating for a peaceful world to pursue their interests. In addition, they have the economic and military capabilities to defend themselves. They influence great powers' strategies as long as they do not directly affect the interests of that great power.

### **Alignment strategies in the context of great power competition**

As mentioned above, small powers cannot defend themselves whilst middle powers can defend themselves but not against the attacks of the Great powers. The weaker states (small and middle powers) will align with strategic solutions that avoid losses and achieve their goals in the context of great power competition (Kuik, 2016; Edström et al., 2018). *Alignment refers to “the manner and extent to which a state chooses to position vis-à-vis (align with or away from) a powerful player(s) in the regional and international system, based on the degree of convergence (and/or divergence) in interests and support among them across key policy domains”* (Kuik, 2016, p. 501). In this section, we identify the most common alignment strategies: balancing, bandwagoning, and hedging. These strategies have their characteristics, but they have one thing in common: they help countries avoid losses and gain their own benefits in an anarchic world system .

Balancing is a strategy adopted by both great powers and small powers. For the great powers, adopting a balancing strategy to increase their power is to protect their long-term interests and position in the system by balancing against competing powers. In a competitive landscape, the great powers enhance their power by balancing differences in the distribution of capabilities. This means that by supporting weak states or alliances (be it nations or alliances threatened by another great power) to draw them to their side, the great powers will gain more power. At the same time, the above action also shows the great powers' political will and military ability to support weaker countries and prevent potential rivals. For weaker states, adopting a balancing strategy helps them aim for protection and avoid losses. In adopting this strategy, weaker countries will rely on alliances with great powers to seek protection and support (Edström and Westberg, 2022). There are two approaches to balancing these weaker countries. Weaker states in the alliance can rely on more substantial commitments to allies' collective defense arrangements to increase their ability to provide support from a state or alliance to increase their ability to give and receive assistance militarily against threatening states. This is called the chain-ganging method. Weaker states, unilaterally or in a coalition, can apply courting behavior by leaning towards a particular state or alliance in order to increase the likelihood of receiving assistance, including the provision and military assistance, from that particular state or that alliance, against threatening states. A concrete example of this approach is the case of how the Ukraine "courts" the West in order to receive support against Russian aggression. Bandwagoning is the exact opposite strategy of balancing against threatening states. Bandwagoning strategies are chosen by smaller countries based on the situation they face.

When these small states perceive a threat from a larger state or an alliance, the smaller state will incline to that threatening state or alliance to appease the threat to avoid an attack. They also make Unilateral concessions to the threatening state to strengthen their security. This is called the defensive bandwagoning strategy. This is the strategy that Finland adopted with the Soviet Union during the Cold War. In the case of an unstable security structure, when weaker states do not perceive a threat, they will choose an offensive bandwagoning strategy. A strategy is driven by the opportunity to gain benefits and support from non-threatening countries. Weak countries align themselves with the dominant party in an unstable international structure to split the profits and cooperate with that party in the conflict to contribute to the joint effort. This is the strategy used by Italy in World War I. Although Italy was in an alliance with Germany at that time, it kept a neutral position and did not want to participate in the war. Then, with awareness of the opportunity to benefit from the war, Italy chose to side with the Entente powers (Edström et al., 2018, Edström and Westberg, 2020).

Hedging is also a strategy many weaker states adopt in the context of great power competition. The application of a hedging strategy by a weaker state clearly demonstrates two factors: accepting power through selective cooperation with great power and denying the power through resistance and defiance of that power. Hedging is defined in great detail by Kuik (2016) as a behavior that seeks insurance in situations of high risk and uncertainty. A weaker state pursues policies that are purposefully opposed and ambiguous with competing powers in order to prepare for a fallback position should circumstances change. This behavior aims to get as much benefit from the other great powers as possible when the relationship between the weaker state and that great power is good. At the same time, this strategy also helps weaker countries find ways to offset the long-term risks that can occur in bad situations. Those risks include weaker countries adopting inappropriate policies and being shunned by the great powers. According to Kuik, *“hedging must entail three policy elements: (a) an insistence on not taking sides among competing powers (or, in the case of big powers, not fully aligning ones’ own interest and support with another power); (b) the practice of adopting opposite and counteracting measures; and (c) the use of the opposite acts as instruments to pursue the goals of preserving gains while cultivating a ‘fallback’ position”* (Kuik 2016, pp. 504).<sup>1</sup> The factor in determining to hedge should be placed in the spectrum of bandwidth balance between balancing and bandwagoning, usually in the middle. This means that the hedging's position

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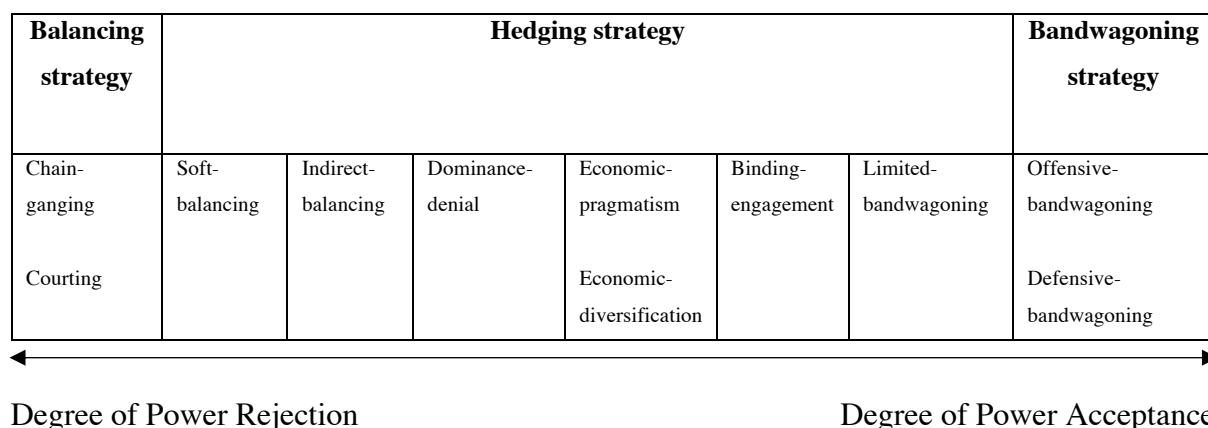
<sup>1</sup>For a perceptive analysis of ‘fallback’ policy as a small-state strategic behavior under uncertainty, see Yuen Foong Khong, ‘Singapore: a time for economic and political engagement’, in Johnston and Ross, eds, *Engaging China*, pp. 109–128; Khong, ‘Coping with strategic uncertainty’.

does not have to be right in the middle. It can be anywhere as long as it is within the spectrum band. The position may be in favor of bandwagoning in order to maximize economic, diplomatic, and political benefits when the relationship of a hedging state and a great power are good. In a bad situation, that hedging state can be positioned closer to the balancing side to reduce the risks of great power. In the context of great power competition, the hedger pursues both options at the same time so that their effects cancel each other out. This is intended to help the hedger build an image of not taking sides or going against either side. Hedgers need to keep the backup position for as long as possible in the context of the great power competition. For-profit maximization options, hedgers have three policies to maximize profits:

- economic pragmatism
- maximizing diplomatic benefits by joining and binding a great power in multilateral cooperation, institutionalized bilateral (Binding-engagement)
- maximization of political benefits by establishing peer-to-peer partnerships over a great power (limited-bandwagoning)

The second option of balancing hedgers, motivated in part of economic-pragmatism, is to diversify investment trade linkages. More towards Balancing in the spectrum, hedgers in the face of great power will take non-military measures to balance the influence between the great powers to reduce the risk (Dominance-denial). Kuik gave an example of this with the case in Southeast Asia. Fearing the expansion of China's image, Southeast Asian countries, including Singapore and Indonesia, have joined hands with Japan to promote the inclusion of India, Australia, and New Zealand in the Southeast Asia Summit Asia (EAS) as a counterweight against China's regional influence (Kuik, 2016, pp. 510-511). Hedger minimizes security risks by using military means to strengthen defense partnerships and upgrade its military but not targeting a specific state (Indirect-balancing). And finally, close to balancing on the spectrum is hedgers forming alliances or exercising limited diplomacy through upgrading existing alliances (soft-balancing) (Kuik, 2016, Chen and Yang, 2013).

**Figure 1.** Power rejection/acceptance spectrum



(Source: Adapted from Kuik, 2016, pp.502).

It can be said that hedging is a strategy that brings maximum benefits to weaker countries as well as prepares for the worst possible cases for these countries in the context of competition between great powers. A state is called Hedger if and only if it exercises both options as mentioned above at the same time.

As mentioned above, the small powers do not have the ability to influence the great powers in the international political arena, nor are they able to defend themselves, so they cannot apply a hedging strategy. This strategy requires states to have the ability to defend themselves, as well as the ability to influence the great powers for the great powers to consider. A hedging strategy is more suitable for middle powers when small powers cannot afford to apply hedging options. The strategy of hedging entails making the two options analyzed above at the same time and placing the country applying this strategy in the middle of the competing powers. To do that, a power that wants to adopt this strategy requires the ability to defend itself and influence competing powers to maximize its interests and protect its core interests. Small powers are defenseless and incapable of influencing great powers (great powers do not benefit from these small powers). The great powers will ignore the small powers or may eliminate the small powers from the order, leading to a failed strategy. With their limited capabilities, the small power is suitable for applying the strategy of balancing and bandwagoning.

### **III. The national security of the U.S.**

The national security strategy of the United States is an essential tool for shaping national security interests, defining domestic and foreign interests, and shaping America's construction and development strategies. The national security strategy of the United States will change

depending on the situation at home and in the world. In addition, it is also based on the president's assessment and strategic plan at that time that the U.S. national security strategy will have different characteristics and directions. With the desire to understand the history of national security strategies of the United States of America so that they can assess the development process and how events, contexts, and outcomes of the past and present fit together. As Richard K. Betts once wrote: "For historians, it is self-evident that we cannot know where we are going unless we understand where we have come from." (Betts, 2005, pp.3) For that reason, this part of the thesis will explore and analyze the US strategies from the Col War period until the current US-China competitive landscape. From there, there is more data to answer the big research question of the thesis.

### **US National Security Strategy during the Cold War**

After the second world war, the United States and the Soviet Union became the two great powers in the world. However, they had opposing political ideologies, which created a period of confrontation between the two countries and divided the world into two distinct international orders. The Soviet Union was America's competitor and threat during this period. The formulation of US national security strategies was built around this preoccupation. In the bipolar context of that time, the US prioritized developing and asserting its strength rather than focusing on building and implementing a cooperative world. During the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union did not declare war against each other directly, instead providing weapons and money to their allies to carry out proxy wars. In particular, European Integration and building a network of allies initially helped the US create a military alliance to reduce military pressure was the original US strategy. Nevertheless, the US led the Integration to consolidate power with the US military presence. At this time, the American political world formed two views, a comprehensive conception and a narrow conception of security, for their national strategy, which has had an impact to this day in the creation of national security strategies of America (Betts, 2005):

1. Conception of comprehensive of security : With this concept, the US should focus on developing an accessible and comprehensive international cooperation mechanism. This view considers military power as necessary but not necessary to devote too many resources to it. However, the US should focus on the economy, human rights issues, public health, and the environment. These are the factors that this concept considers as a civilization and necessary development factor. This strategy helps to maximize economic and political cooperation. The

military should be codified into collective security. See the safety of the United States first and use the network of cooperation to combat violations of international law.

2. Conception of Narrow of security: This view concerns American strength and nationalism focused against America's enemies. It argues that National Security cannot be equated with foreign policies. In this view, the most critical US national security strategy is military strength to confront the threat posed by the Soviet Union.

In the end, during the cold war period, the military strategy of force was chosen by the United States. Politics and economy are secondary factors compared to the military and aid race for the worldwide wars against Communism. In 1949, a military alliance was formed by the United States and European countries, known as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). This military alliance helped protect European countries, eased American military pressure, and kept America's prominent role in the Cold War. However, the concept of comprehensive of security still plays an important role in the future of US national security strategy.

In summary, during the cold war years, there was a view that the United States should develop a national security strategy based on diplomacy and economic strength. However, the US chose to implement a national security strategy with the central role of military power to deal with the threat from the Soviet Union in the bipolar world period. Furthermore, as the results show, and no doubt, this strategy helped the US succeed when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, and the US became the sole superpower in the international system. The world entered the phase of unipolarity (Betts, 2005, pp.4-11).

### **US national strategy after the cold war**

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the system of socialist countries disintegrated, and the United States became the only power with comprehensive economic, military, and political power. This is an opportunity for the US to rearrange the US-led world order. The US national security strategy shifts from managing the bipolar rivalry to exploiting its unipolar advantage. The strategic goal of the US at this stage is to strengthen the US leadership role in the economy and politics around the world and establish a new world order led by the United States. To accomplish this goal, the US uses multilateralism (multilateralism has also been used in the past by the US, specifically multilateral cooperation with NATO). The multilateralism employed by the United States is not meant to control the world but rather a means for the United States to legitimize its leadership role in the world. During this time, the United States

implemented strategies to deter potential adversaries and prevent advanced countries from challenging American leadership. Military tools are still favored to accomplish these strategic goals. The US is ready to use force to prevent any one or a group of countries from trying to compete for influence with the US. To achieve its goal of world leadership, the United States must maintain international peace and stability. With its military might, the US has taken small-scale military actions to deal with problems from rogue states (which are small countries) as a result of the cold war. In addition, the US uses military power for humanitarian activities and peacekeeping worldwide. With the goal of a new world order led by the US, the US expanded the meaning of the NATO alliance from a purely military alliance to a military and political alliance to expand its influence and spread American values across the world. The US security priorities at this time have been changed compared to the cold war era. The US focused more on globalization. The US uses military activities aimed at solving ethnic problems and helping countries around the world stabilize. This is beneficial to political and economic globalization when the US believes that a developed and secure world will strengthen the leadership role of the new world order for the US. The above strategic elements show that the US security strategy at the moment is similar to the comprehensive concept. The post-cold war period was when the United States had no competitors and no threat to a powerful America. The goal of the United States at this stage is to utilize its comprehensive economic, military, and political strength to establish a new, unipolar world order led by the United States and impose American values on the world, such as "freedom," "democracy," "human rights." However, these imposed strategies and policies bring political events that change the national security strategies of the United States in the future. Specifically, here is the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in the US on September 11, 2001. The attack on Pearl Harbor was the first time America was directly attacked. The September 11 incident prompted the American political elite to rethink its national security strategies.

### **America's National Security Strategy After September 11, 2001**

The September 11 incident was the flip side of globalization as it demonstrated the opposition to "Westernization" and American preeminence in the post-Cold War era. After the above event, countering terrorism became the top security priority of the US. The United States has replaced the former dominant open world view with a Cold War-like strategy of using the force of force to counter the threat of terrorism. However, there are differences in the goal of using military force in the post-9/11 era compared with the cold war era. In order to achieve



the goal of maintaining America's leadership role in the new world order and combating terrorism, the US has changed the original purpose of establishing NATO; previously, the purpose of NATO in the war was collective defense. The cold war is collective defense. However, since 2004, this goal has been superseded when then-US President George W. Bush laid out a plan to deploy US military forces in Europe near unstable areas where the US could intervene. Since then, NATO's military goals have been to manage world order and conduct humanitarian aggression. Global anti-terrorism coalitions led by the US have been formed and implemented for a large-scale war. The national security and foreign policy strategies of the United States during this period were aimed at fighting terrorism on a global scale and destroying terrorist groups, as well as those who covered them. The United States will eliminate those who seek to attack the United States, the interests of the United States, and its allies. Overall, this period has changed the US strategy significantly, from the goal towards a US-led world order and the dissemination of American values in the US-dominated, unipolar, and non-US environment threat - to an environment where the threat to America is terrorism, which persists to the present. The United States, after this point, still holds to its goals of an American-led world order, but the approach to and implementation of those goals has changed after 9/11. This was part of a broad effort to carry out "state-building".

### **The National Security Strategy from the Barack Obama Administration to Joe Biden**

The world after 9/11 has had many significant changes, both in politics, economy and international relations, with the goal of the United States throughout the post-Cold War period of consolidating and developing the world order against new threats. Including persistent terrorism, the rise of nationalism technological breakthroughs, and common security issues such as epidemics, natural disasters, and climate change. Which required the United States to have broader, more diversified, and resource-intensive strategies in all areas. From President Barack Obama's administration to Donald Trump's presidency and now to Joe Biden, each stage has been developed by the above presidents with national security strategies appropriate to the world's situation. These national security strategies have similarities and differences. However, they share a common goal of helping the United States achieve its cross-cutting goal of upholding the US-led world order with American values.

*The national security strategy (N.S.S) under President Barack Obama* affirms US leadership role in the world, with leading elements including "lead with purpose," "lead with strength," "lead by example," "lead with capable partners." (2015, pp. 2-3). These leading

factors can be said to be the guideline for the national security strategy under President Obama. Based on that direction, the national security strategy of the US under Obama has specified four national interests that the US aims to:

"Security"

In particular, the top goal is to protect the United States and the American people against terrorist activities globally, and to protect our allies is the top goal. For international security, the United States uses its diverse alliances and supports local partners to ensure a peaceful, stable world. With this approach, the US can reduce its military pressure and redeploy military forces to meet a wide range of threats worldwide while still ensuring its strategic goals to protect America and America. For direct threats to the United States, the United States is ready to destroy these threats with tough actions. The United States also focuses on building the capacity of other countries to prevent conflicts and common threats. With its security interests in mind, the United States views its allies as central to its security efforts, including NATO, South Korea, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, the Philippines, and Israel. The US also sets specific goals to achieve its security goals. Strengthening national defense is the first goal of the United States in the interest of security. The United States considers the development and modernization of the military, weapons, and controlled use of force as essential factors to achieve this goal. However, the US is also ready to use force if the national interests and the American people are threatened unilaterally. The US will work with its allies on other issues to share the burden. The US will carefully consider the use of force before acting. The factors of US mission, global responsibility, costs, and benefits will be weighed before the US decides action of force. Strengthening homeland security is also an important goal to obtain US security interests. The US considers fighting terrorism as the primary responsibility of homeland security in addition to fighting threats from various types of crime. The foundation to successfully realize this goal is to develop essential services and needs the contribution of society, including people, local communities, and public-private sectors to contribute to building society strong American society against threats within America.

Combating terrorism is again reiterated in the goal of impacting US security interests. Under President Bush, as mentioned above, the United States waged large-scale wars against terrorism around the world. As a result, the US had many losses in terms of money and American soldiers' lives. Terrorism still exists today, although the US has made some achievements in destroying terrorist organizations. This shows that the US needed a change in its strategy against terrorism, and the US has changed its tactics. The United States has

transformed the scale of its extensive and costly wars against terrorism into a targeted counter-terrorism strategy and collaborating with responsible American partners. In addition, the United States is building the capacity of vulnerable countries and communities to defeat terrorists in these places. Building capacity for conflict prevention to prevent conflict within and between countries is the goal that the United States will pursue to ensure security and peace around the world. To accomplish it, the United States uses its diplomacy and leadership, which are greatly supported by military power. The United States will continue to affirm its security commitment to allies and partners, helping countries resist coercion and making bullies pay for their actions. In addition, the United States also strengthens the United Nations' capacity and regional organizations' capacity. Preventing the spread and use of nuclear weapons is America's next security goal. The US has always viewed nuclear weapons as a security threat. To prevent the spread and use of nuclear weapons, the United States aims to strengthen nuclear non-proliferation treaties. The United States itself is also working to reduce the role and number of nuclear weapons, as well as push for a multilateral ban on nuclear testing. Other security goals require coordination and cooperation with the US of all countries worldwide, including Combating climate change, Ensuring access to shared spaces ( cybersecurity, space security, aviation, and maritime security), and Strengthening global health security. Besides, the NSS under the Obama administration also emphasizes a regional shift to Asia-Pacific

## 2. America's Prosperity

It is in America's second national interest to promote its prosperity. The United States, under President Obama, is the country with the most open and developed economy in the world. Maintaining American leadership depends on shaping the world economic order with American values and interests. Therefore, the United States wants to enhance its prosperity through the following goals: Taking advantage of a strong economy, the United States aims to develop its economy further through investment in the education of the young generation, reform immigration, develop a health care system for people, and create job opportunities for Americans. The US believes that the economy is a measure of military power and diplomatic influence, so realizing this goal is necessary. The next goal to achieve prosperity for America is to improve energy security. The US sees energy as one of the important factors in supporting social and economic development, and energy will be a potential new market for US investment. The US aims to diversify its raw materials, energy sources, and routes. Having a large and independent energy security will contribute to the country's success in its quest for prosperity. Shaping the global economic order is also targeted by the United States for

achieving prosperity. With its leadership, the United States aims to strengthen global financial rules, ensuring consistency and transparency. In addition, trade agreements with the economic and strategic interests of the United States will be promoted by the United States with its leadership advantage. Besides the goals in its national prosperity strategy, the goal of ending extreme poverty is also mentioned. Leveraging its leadership role, the US promotes private sector investment models and promotes food security to be able to achieve this goal.

### 3. American Values

The United States considers the threats to its security in recent years to be efforts against democracy by authoritarian, autocratic states. So protecting democracy and key human rights is vital to upholding the national interest. To do that, the US sets the goal that America always lives with its values, including enhancing its values of freedom, human rights, and individual liberties. Equality is also one of the goals that the US aims for when promoting gender equality, ensuring equal rights for people with disabilities, women, children, and immigrants. Supporting emerging democracy and empowering civil society for young leaders, in the above two goals, the US again condemns autocratic, authoritarian societies. The United States believes that the political elites of authoritarian countries are limiting civil societies, and the United States is willing to help countries that aspire to share the US values of a free and democratic society. In addition, the United States will also work with the international community to prevent human rights abuses worldwide to fulfill its goal of Preventing Mass Atrocities.

### 4. “International Order”

The final national interest mentioned in President Obama's US national security strategy is to shape the US-led world order. The United States believes it has advantages, opportunities, and obligations in shaping the world order it leads. The US has policies and strategies specific to each region to achieve this national interest. The United States aims to promote the rebalancing of Asia and the Pacific. The goals of this strategy are for the United States to establish a solid and reliable U.S. presence throughout Asia to encourage constructive Chinese action and build confidence in other countries in the region. that they are not comfortable with China's rise (Lieberthal, 2016). It includes the main objectives such as strengthening relations with allies; Strengthen relations with partner countries in the region. Actively participate in regional architecture building, such as East Asia Summit (EAS), Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), and ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). The United States has also increased its military presence, deployed rotational troops to the region, and maintained its presence through bilateral and multilateral military exercises. The US aims to

promote economic cooperation with the region, including negotiating the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), supporting APEC, and the Initiative for Expanding Economic Engagement with ASEAN (E3). Finally, The US continues to spread the values of democracy and human rights (My Chau, 2022) . To achieve this goal, the United States will enhance its leadership role toward stability and security in the region. In addition, the United States wants to diversify and modernize its alliances in the Asia-Pacific region to ensure that it can respond to challenges in the region. The US has also built extensive partnerships with Southeast Asian countries, including Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaysia. The United States welcomes the rise of a stable, peaceful, and prosperous China. However, not ruling out the possibility of confrontation with China, the US will manage the competition from a position of power and emphasize that China needs to comply with international rules and standards on maritime security, trade, and human right. The United States will also oversee China's military modernization and expansion in Asia. In addition, the US strengthens regional institutions to ensure common norms, practice collective responses to shared challenges, and peacefully resolve regional disputes. With India, the US strengthens its strategic and economic ties, backing India as a regional security provider. Strengthening allies in Europe is the goal of the US in the European region. The US considers Russia's invasion of Ukraine a violation of international rules and will punish Russia. In addition, the United States has also strengthened NATO's strength to protect its allies in Europe and actively help countries in this region to defend and prevent aggressive actions of Russia and to ensure energy security in this region in the short term. The US goal in the Middle East and North Africa is to seek stability and peace. In this region, the United States is committed to providing security assistance to this region to reduce conflicts and destroy terrorist networks. Like Africa and the Americas, the United States supports these regions with commitments to support the economy, security, food, and health. Ensure the above areas are stable and peaceful. (2015)

*During the tenure of President Donald Trump*, the world has witnessed changes and events that strongly affect world politics and the economy, such as the substantial rise of China and the epidemic. Faced with those issues, President Donald Trump's administration has released a 56-page national security strategy to analyze US national interests in the face of increasingly fierce competition between the US and China. If under President Obama, the national strategy considers American leadership as necessary and moves toward a free, stable, peaceful, and open world order. In which countries will work together to fight common threats and strictly comply with international rules led by the US, the US national security strategy

under President Donald Trump is somewhat harsh and hard. more solid. Based on his "America First" stance, President Donald Trump has issued a strategy that carries a strong message of protecting America's interests.

The national interests of the United States under Trump are not different from those of Obama, but the goals are different, which are:

- Protect the American people and country

The difference is that the U.S. N.S.S. under President Trump has pointed out the threats and challenges to U.S. power as Russia and China (resulted in the US revamping national security by identifying China and Russia as rivals that openly challenge the US.), dictatorships, rogue regimes, terrorism, and transnational crime family. In the face of such threats, the United States focuses on protecting its borders and territories, enhancing its missile systems, finding and destroying weapons of mass destruction, targeting, and local terrorists who possess weapons of mass destruction. The United States is also focused on combating pandemics and biological threats by working with partners to detect and prevent diseases early. At the same time, the U.S. also supports partners to support biomedical innovation and improve emergency medical response. Border control and immigration policy are also goals to help ensure security within the U.S. The U.S. identifies terrorist threats as possible through immigration, so the U.S. will reform the immigration system, strengthen screening, and identify border security. The grant of residency and citizenship will be based on personal merit and the ability to contribute positively to the United States rather than on family ties. In addition, the United States will also pursue threats from terrorism and transnational crime at the root. For this, the United States needs coordination from allies and partners to prevent terrorist intentions. The way to accomplish this goal is that the U.S. shares intelligence at home and with foreign partners, and the U.S. military directly carries out operations to destroy terrorists, their hiding places, and networks.

- Promote America's Prosperity

At this time, America's prosperity and security were challenged by economic competition. Therefore, to maintain its economic power, the United States aims to maintain a stable international economic system rooted in reciprocity, free markets, and free trade. The United States led the way in establishing financial institutions, establishing equal rules, and building tools to help stabilize the international economy. To revive the domestic economy, the US reduces the burden of unnecessary regulations that affect development and increase costs, promotes tax reform, improves infrastructure, reduces debt through fiscal responsibility,

limits federal spending, and supports educational and vocational programs to develop the workforce. Promoting free economic relations is America's next goal. To this end, the United States has supplemented trade agreements and upgraded existing trade and investment agreements, pursued bilateral trade agreements, and fought unfair trade practices. ; oppose foreign corruption; work with like-minded partners to enforce fair trade. At the same time, the US cooperates with other countries to build export markets, promote free market cooperation, and promote the development of the private economic sector. To lead the field of research, technology, invention, and innovation, the US determined it was necessary to understand technology trends, attract investors, and remove unnecessary barriers to utilizing talent, creating an easy path for scientists and investors. To promote and protect the foundation of national security initiatives, the United States will protect intellectual property by preventing hostile foreign competitors from illegally possessing American technology and technical knowledge. The US considers China to be a country that steals US technology assets. The United States will protect its National Security Innovation Base (NSIB) because it is a network of American knowledge, capabilities, and people. To do this, the US will protect its intellectual property rights and tighten VISA procedures when restricting STEM students from designated countries from entering the US. The goal of capturing energy dominance is also mentioned. The US will use its abundant energy resources to develop its economy, reduce barriers, and limit regulatory burdens that hinder energy production and inhibit US economic development, promote energy exports and develop strong US energy technology segments.

- Peacekeeping is based on the strength

The US identifies the power struggle as a problem that needs to be resolved (China has been exerting influence to change the order structure of the region and the world, and Russia is disrupting the stability of the region and the world through the war in Ukraine. Both issues adversely affect the US-led world order.), Iran and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea as rogue states, and terrorism as a persistent security threat. The US believes that China is always looking to replace the US in the Indo-Pacific region, thereby China will expand its state-driven economic model and rearrange the region in favor of China. Meanwhile, the US assesses that Russia is seeking to restore its status as a great power and establish influence near its borders. Protecting the interests of the United States requires the country to continuously compete with the threats mentioned above by strengthening the political, economic, and military power of the United States, and allies also need to show their will to confront that shared threat. The US recognizes its problems because they are too confident with the

liberalization and integration of democracy. The US believes it will fundamentally change the nature of international relations competition to peaceful cooperation. Moreover, The US has reduced its military size to its lowest level since 1940. Russia and China employ military tactics to deny US access and counter US geopolitical advantage. America's adversaries have combined economic, political, military, and informational forces to achieve their goals and do so below the threshold of open military conflict and beyond international law. This makes it difficult for the US and its allies to react. Solving the difficulties for the US towards renewing its capabilities include: Enhancing military strength and identifying the military as an important factor in competing for influence. In addition, the US is modernizing its military and upgrading its weapons systems. The US also improves combat readiness and maintains the forces' combat capabilities. In addition, the US also focuses on developing its defense industrial base. The US wants to improve the domestic defense industry's production capacity and a stable military supply chain. To achieve this goal, the US orients to promote and invest in the defense industry in the country. In addition, the US will also focus on nuclear forces. The United States considers nuclear weapons the cornerstone of its security strategy. While nuclear weapons cannot wholly prevent conflict, the United States can use them to prevent nuclear attacks. America's commitment to nuclear deterrence to its allies and partners also reduces the need for nuclear weapons. The United States will focus on investing in and maintaining its nuclear arsenal in response to national security threats. The United States will also modernize its nuclear forces and infrastructure. In addition, the United States will consider nuclear arms control agreements with other countries to reduce nuclear risks. At the same time, the United States will maintain the leadership role and freedom of action in space as the goals of President Obama. In addition to taking the military as an important factor in competition, the US also focuses on developing diplomacy and state management capabilities. With competitive diplomatic goals, the US aims to promote the protection of US interests abroad, maintain dialogue and promote areas of cooperation, and determine the implementation of diplomatic conflict resolution when there is no military involvement. To achieve those goals, the US will maintain a diplomatic presence in the future, enhancing US interests. American diplomats need to identify opportunities for commercial cooperation and cultural exchanges, network with political and civil society leaders, and create networks of people who want to expand the free world. In addition, the US uses economic and diplomatic tools to maintain its preeminence and its central role in the international financial forum. The United States considers prosperous nations to be strong security partners. The United States will strengthen economic relations with allies and partners



to achieve these goals. This is the core element in relations with like-minded countries. The United States will also put economic pressure on security threats and eliminate sources of terrorism financing.

- Devise a strategy for each region

The United States recognizes that the shifting regional balance of power threatens American interests. Therefore, the US needs to maintain its balance of power in the Indo-Pacific region. However, the US needs commitment and close cooperation from allies and partners in the region to do that because these factors are very important in enhancing power and expanding influence. US influence in the region. This section focuses on the Indo-Pacific region. For this region, the US said that although the US has tried to find ways to cooperate with China, China still makes moves to create regional influence and challenge US influence in the region. In response to China, the United States works to improve and strengthen its alliance relationship in the region, welcomes India's development, and encourages quadrilateral cooperation between Japan, Australia, the United States, and India. At the same time, the US strengthens security and economic cooperation with Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia. The US also considers institutions such as ASEAN and APEC as architectural centers and regional foundations for promoting a freedom-based regional order. Economically, the United States strengthens regional cooperation, maintains freedom of commerce at sea, and encourages peaceful settlement of disputes. The US focuses on building bilateral and fair trade. Militarily, the US maintains its military presence in the region and is ready to use force against the enemy. At the same time, the US strengthens military ties with allies and improves law enforcement, defense, and intelligence cooperation with Southeast Asian countries against all terrorist threats. In addition, the US also supports the "One China" policy towards Taiwan, expanding defense and security cooperation with India. Not only that, but the US has also increased cooperation with Singapore, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaysia to turn these countries into maritime partners of the US (2017)

*The national security strategy under President Joe Biden* has many similarities with his predecessor Trump in that the national interests of the United States remain the same. The United States considers Russia a threat to global peace and stability and considers China a long-term adversary. The US believes China will always compete with the US to become the world leader and change the world order. The United States reaffirms that the Indo-Pacific region is an important area of US national strategy. The United States aspires to promote a free and open Indo-Pacific. The United States will continue strengthening cooperation with regional

countries, assert freedom of the seas, and build joint regional support for broad access to the South China Sea. The US once again affirmed the central role of ASEAN in the region. At the same time, the United States will deepen its relationship with partners in Southeast Asia. The US will also participate in regional diplomatic and economic development, focusing on Southeast Asian countries as well as helping these countries deal with issues of climate change, the Covid pandemic, and China's coercive behaviors.(2022)

Thus, based on the national security strategies of the United States from the cold war period up to now, it can be seen that strategic competition between major powers has returned. China and Russia have begun to assert dominance and spread their influence regionally and globally. Moreover, the US has viewed China as a competitor for long-term world leadership and has planned for a world that is no longer unipolar, led by the US.

#### **IV. China's Strategies**

##### **Foreign policies of China from the 1950s to the 2010s**

After its founding in October 1949, the People's Republic of China had more enemies than friends in its early years. Western countries and some Eastern countries isolated China at this time, so the Soviet Union was China's a choice for cooperation and the development of diplomatic relations. The reason is that the leaders of both China and the Soviet Union at this time were Communist Parties. During this time, the Soviet Union supported China with security through Security Cooperation between the two countries, which meant that the Soviet Union was China's sole patron. The Geneva Conference (1945) and the Bandung Conference (1955) were the first two national conferences that China attended, as well as the country's first steps into the world. In the late 1950s, the relationship between China and the Soviet Union broke down as the Soviet Union criticized China's reform policies. And, China condemns the policy of "peaceful coexistence" between the Soviet Union and The U.S. Overall, China's relations in the 1950s were dominated by international isolation and relations with the Soviet Union (Shambaugh, 2020, pp.5-8)

After irrevocable contradictions and ideological differences between leaders Mao Zedong and Nikita Khrushchev, relations between China and the Soviet Union ended in 1962, and they became rivals. At this time, China was in a situation of losing protection from the Soviet Union and having two great enemies at the same time, i.e., Soviet Union and the United States. The 1960s was a revolutionary period in China's foreign policy when the country carried out a "strong export" policy. It supported Communist Parties across Asia, Africa, and Latin America to overthrow established governments in these regions. The goal was to create a united

Communist front against the United States. At the same time, China also had border conflicts with India and the Soviet Union. In the late 1960s, China viewed the Soviet Union as the main threat when the Soviet Union reserved the right to intervene in any socialist country to prevent "counter-revolution". seeing the Soviet Union as China's main enemy opened the door for the US to cooperate with China. However, China in the 1960s was the most chaotic and destabilizing period in the history of its foreign relations. China's image is internationally judged as an agent of unrest and aggression. China remained isolated from the world during this period.

As mentioned above, in the late 1960s, China saw the Soviet Union as its main rival, creating an opportunity to open up relations with the US. Moreover, of course, the Nixon administration did not miss that. The US wanted to take advantage of the conflict between the Soviet Union and China to draw China to the US side, and bring China into the international community, thereby raising the US position in the struggle against the Soviet Union. This set a new era in China's relations with the world and also affected the situation of the Cold War at that time. The 1970s can be said to be the years of China's integration into the world. China went out into the world through diplomacy. At the beginning of this period, China and the US made moves to open relations through the visits of Henry Kissinger (1971) and Nixon (1972). These moves influenced and facilitated the People's Republic of China's position in the United Nations (November 15, 1971) after the expulsion of the Republic of China (today, Taiwan). China officially normalized relations with the US in 1979. This event created favorable conditions for China to establish diplomatic relations with America's allies in the West and Asia. This resulted in creating conditions for the United States and China to oppose the Soviet Union. Since the above events, China's foreign relations have emphasized the development of relations with advanced and developed countries to gain access to technologies, investment sources, aid sources, and impetus for China's modernization goals. In the 1970s, China gradually developed diplomatic relations with developed countries in the world. At the same time, China was confronting the Soviet Union and its customers (including Vietnam), which was China's top strategic geopolitical challenge. Economic development became the top goal of all Chinese policies during this period (Shambaugh, 2020, pp. 8-13).

In the early 1980s, China reformed and opened up to foreign investment, expanded foreign trade and arms sales, and developed diplomacy with Western countries. However, by the end of the 1980s, China had tarnished its national image and prestige with the Tiananmen incident. China's relations with the US and the West became strained after this event. The US and the

West implemented sanctions against China, causing the country's political, military, and economic cooperation during this period to be seriously affected. Once again, China was isolated. Moreover, the pressure from the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s led to the collapse of the Socialist system, making China worst. Because China was economically, politically, and diplomatically isolated; the ideological support (the communist bloc of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe) of the Chinese communist government was no longer exists. However, Asian countries are more cautious and less critical of China. For example, Singapore has led Asian countries in maintaining contact with China and thinks that isolating China may be counterproductive. In addition, the G7 also lifted sanctions against China in 1995. After the lifting of sanctions, China strengthened ties with European countries, and the US and China have also increased cooperation with countries in Asia. These moves to expand cooperation helped China through the period when a series of Communist countries in Eastern Europe collapsed as well as the Soviet Union broke up. Actively expanding cooperation with the US and the West improved the relationship between the US and China significantly. This is demonstrated by the visit to the US by Jiang Zemin in 1997 and Bill Clinton's visit to China in 1998.

The beginning of the 21st century is a period of growth in China's global prestige as China chooses the path of peaceful development. Specifically, in 2005 China published a white paper bearing the title "China's Peaceful Development Road" with the goals of being consistent with peaceful development, openness, and mutually beneficial cooperation. For a peaceful international environment (Xinhua, 2005). During the 2000s, China established official relations with most countries in the world and expanded its international footprint. This has helped China to increase its presence around the world. During this period, China shifted its foreign relations from prioritizing relations with developed powers to multilateral diplomacy. At the regional level, China actively developed bilateral and multilateral cooperation. China established a series of multilateral institutions in the region and aims for "soft power". With this diplomatic strategy, China improved its image by focusing on activities aimed at developing soft power. In the late 2000s, China made changes and more challenging moves in foreign relations. China confronted neighboring countries, heating up border sovereignty disputes with India, Japan, and the Philippines. China's harsh actions have tarnished its image (Shambaugh, 2020, pp. 15-17).

In the early 2010s, after Xi Jinping came to power, China's dual foreign policy priority was diplomacy with major countries and the implementation of the "Belt and Road Initiative,"

which attracted much attention around the world. During this period, China always emphasized that it should play a significant role in global governance and multilateral diplomacy. China has demonstrated a proactive foreign policy. Besides, based on its economic strength and rapidly developing military, China has implemented harsh policies and actions in maritime sovereignty disputes with neighboring countries such as Japan, the Philippines as well as Vietnam. China is also increasing its influence over countries in Asia and the world through its "belt and road initiative." (Shambaugh, 2020)

### **China's current national security strategy**

In the current context, China believes that peace and stability are the shared aspirations of the international community. Countries that are fostering, arms race and nuclear containment have failed. In addition, extremism and terrorism are spreading. Diseases and cyber security issues are increasingly complex. Each country's security is intertwined, linked, and interacted with each other. No country stands by or can react alone.

China, under the leadership of the Communist Party and headed by Xi Jinping, is implementing political, defense, and economic policies to achieve national interests.

- Protect domestic politics
- Protecting territorial integrity and navigation
- Maintain domestic and foreign economic interests

In order to achieve the above-mentioned national interests, China has realized the goal of increasing its influence in the region and the world through its diplomatic, economic, and defense strategies (Jiayao, 2019).

#### *Diplomatic strategy toward restructuring the world order:*

As mentioned in the section of China's diplomatic history, in 1993, China participated in the Asia-Pacific economic cooperation summit and returned to the world order after being isolated by sanctions. Since then, China has followed the logic of economic liberalization in a Western-centered order, with the United States at the top of this order. Despite economic liberalization, China still opposes political liberalization. This proves that China has consistently defended its political system led by the Communist Party. China believes that its rise to great power status allows it to take on a new role in world affairs that cannot be reconciled with American domination. China has now rejected American leadership on some issues but not in areas where China feels it has an advantage. In China's eyes, China is now at a powerful stage. The US-led unipolar order is fading, its erosion accelerated by the rise of China. Instead, there is a

multipolar order with US-China relations at the core. Because of the above reasons, there are three views on the current world order in China:

1. The current world order is unjust and needs to be restructured. China should be the leader in shaping the future world order.

2. The current world order is acceptable but needs to be adjusted. China should take the lead in this reform.

3. The world order is stable and needs tweaking. China should neither lead nor seek leadership but should cooperate with other countries to improve the existing world order (Tang, 2018, pp. 33-35).

However, views 2 and 3 are the views that China aimed for when Chinese officials have always asserted that China is the guarantor of the existing world order, not the leader.

In addition, China recognized the potential areas it could lead, namely international finance and international integration. Therefore, China formulated policies on the world order related to hard power and financial trade, centered on West Asia and Asia-Pacific, led by China. With this view, China defends the Westphalian order (after 1945) accepting the sovereignty of countries, defends globalization, and supports the United Nations. At the same time, China rejects the post-Cold War order that favors interventionism and regime change. This means that China does not accept any foreign interference in the internal politics of any country in the world. This is also consistent with the opinion of economic liberalism but not the political liberalism of Chinese rulers. China considers the US efforts to form alliances based on issues against China over technology and human rights as a serious external threat. Of course, China's position is somewhat at odds with the values of a liberal US-led order (Tang, 2018).

China has insisted on not exporting China's political system and governance model to other countries like the Soviet Union in the past. Specifically, in the speech of Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi at the Asia Society (2022), there was a passage, "Some worry that China will export its ideology and threaten the values of other countries. This is completely unnecessary. China has no history of preaching to or lecturing others, and has no intention to export its system or path today" (Wang Yi, 2022). Nor does China reject existing multilateral rules and institutions. However, China does not accept the rules that the US makes without consulting China. This demonstrates that China is moving towards norms based on inclusive multilateralism. In addition, China considers sanctions on this country as an act of interference in China's internal affairs and takes retaliatory sanctions. To avoid pressure from the US and the West, China implemented economic policies to reduce its dependence on

foreign markets by building and strengthening the domestic market to reduce its vulnerability to foreign markets vulnerable to foreign economic pressure. At the same time, China reduces the possibility of US sanctions and financial control by promoting the development of the yuan in trade, foreign investment, and cryptocurrencies. China actively influences the world economy through its Belt and Road initiative and seeks cooperation with other countries in the technology field. As long as China resists pressure from the US in its attempt to separate China from this front. (Xuetong, 2021)

*Economic strategy through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)*

China believes the BRI can help it develop globally. China designed the BRI to access new markets, hold critical infrastructure assets and influence the strategic decisions of countries in the region. China wished to expand friendly relations for economic and trade development without US-style political constraints. From there, China could win diplomatic allies and create prosperity for the world and China itself. However, Chinese leader Xi Jinping insisted that the BRI is not the same as the Marshall Plan and it is not a strategic conspiracy of China. The goal of the BRI that China hopes to achieve is that the BRI will turn China into a dominant power in Asia and beyond in the world. China used infrastructure projects and investments to attract more countries in the region and the world to participate in the BRI network to achieve this goal. After these countries have joined the BRI, China would put pressure on these countries to avoid alignment with the US and reduce the challenge to China's core interests. China's next aim is to achieve geo-economic benefits. Under US pressure, China could not access the markets of the US and advanced countries. Therefore, China wanted to use BRI to connect large geographical areas and access emerging markets such as East Asia, Central Asia, South Asia, and Central and Eastern Europe. In addition, China also promoted exports by building seaports to ensure reliable transport routes. BRI helped define and export Chinese technical standards across the entire spectrum of infrastructure. These standards had the potential to replace Western and American standards. In addition, the BRI also served as a growth stimulus package for China's economy by helping Chinese companies discover and easily access new markets in the region and around the world. China's next goal for the BRI is to deter security threats from the West. By promoting the economic development of these regions, the BRI will help narrow the gap between the rich and the poor in the interior of countries, thereby helping the region achieve political and security stability. The ultimate aim is to strengthen nationalism in the interior of China. The fact that the BRI attracts many countries to participate in this network may be an image that China uses to remind and stimulate national spirit and pride

among the Chinese people. At the same time, it also strengthens the Chinese people's confidence in the Communist Party's leadership ability to help the government protect its political system. The BRI model has attracted developing countries because it provides affordable support to build expensive infrastructure. In addition, developing countries are sceptical of democracy promotion from the West. The BRI model supported diplomacy. This contrasts Western support models, which impose conditions on democracy, transparency, the rule of law, and human rights for recipient countries. In addition, countries have easy access to BRI loans. Countries get those loans to buy Chinese goods and hire Chinese workers. This is profitable for China. In addition, if the debtor countries are unable to repay China, it can seize the loan's collateral or turn the debt into equity for China to control the assets and national infrastructure. This allows China to increase its influence on debtor countries significantly. From that, it can be seen that the BRI is more of China's strategic ambition than economic development goals. (Zhao, 2020)

### *Defense Strategies*

China refused to recognize the 1992 Consensus and considered the "Taiwan independence" separatist forces and their actions seriously threatening China's peace and stability. In addition, territorial and maritime disputes are also a threat to China's interests and territorial integrity. China's national interests are also threatened by influences such as international and regional chaos and terrorism. In order to deal with the above threats and achieve national interests, China had set out strategic defense objectives, including countering aggression, protecting political and people's security, and opposing and restraining the forces of "Taiwan independence." China also suppressed the supporters of the "Tibet independence" movement, wanting to establish East Turkistan, to protect the sovereignty and territorial integrity and support the development of the country. To accomplish those goals, China has adopted an active defense strategy (do not attack unless attacked and counterattack if attacked). In order to develop a national defense, China has carried out a series of reforms related to the leadership and command system. China has also developed its military's combat readiness and combat capabilities. China accelerates the development of mechanization and military information, elevates its strategic capabilities, and modernizes its military to world-class. The People's Liberation Army also implements Xi Jinping's thought, reforming military policies and institutions to promote political loyalty to the military and consolidate the absolute leadership of the Communist Party of China and the Chinese military system of military socialism.



Regarding national territorial issues and maritime interests, China has actively safeguarded border security and stability and cooperated with other countries in resolving border issues. In addition, China also developed a state of military readiness with a focus on the sea and warned against "Taiwan independence" separatist forces for a unified China. In terms of interests inside and outside China, China views nuclear capabilities as the foundation of its strategy to safeguard national sovereignty and security. Therefore, China attached great importance to improving the safety management of nuclear weapons and is ready for nuclear deterrence to ensure its international strategies. In addition, China has built up its cyber capabilities to uphold its sovereignty in cyberspace. On international issues, China has committed to fighting terrorism, actively fulfilling international obligations, and promoting international military cooperation. China also espoused the central role of the United Nations in international affairs and upholds multilateralism. Besides, China opposed hegemony, unilateralism, and double standards. As for the relationship with the US, China assesses that the Sino-US military relationship is still in a stable stage. China still maintains the position of non-conflict, non-confrontation, and win-win cooperation with the US. However, on the Taiwan issue, China resolutely opposed the US's wrongdoing and provocative actions related to arms sales to Taiwan and US sanctions against China. As for the Indo-Pacific region, China assessed that the region is still stable when countries resolve disputes through dialogue and mutual consultation. China believes that the world's strategic economic center will continue to shift to the Indo-Pacific region. Competing major powers will destabilize the region. China believes that the US is strengthening its alliance and increasing its deployment and military intervention will further complicate regional security. On the Chinese side, China continues to increase its influence on economic issues in the Asia-Pacific region through the Belt and Road Initiative. China has developed the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and consolidated its partnership in the region based on a constructive partnership that is non-alliance, non-confrontational, and non-targeted by third parties. China also focused on expanding security and defense cooperation with partners, creating an open security cooperation model in the Asia-Pacific region. In the South China Sea area, China has developed and constructed infrastructure and deployed defensive capabilities in this area. China is committed to resolving disputed issues by negotiating with relevant countries based on international law. China is trying to unify the country peacefully. It said it would be ready to use force if outside forces and "independent Taiwan" separatists dared interfere in reunification. (Jiayao, 2019).

## V. Vietnam's national security strategy

### Vietnam's foreign policy from 1945 to early 2016

Since the Democratic Republic of Vietnam was established in 1945, Vietnam's foreign policy has been heavily structured by ideological assumptions. The reason for pursuing this structure was that, at this stage, Vietnam's political elite had accepted the thesis that the world was divided between socialist and imperialist (capitalist) forces. The Soviet Union was the leading country in terms of strength on the socialist side. At this time, alliance with the Soviet Union was viewed by Vietnam as the basis of its foreign policy. In addition, Vietnam expanded its relations with Laos and Cambodia in order to develop a unified system of allies. After the events in Vietnam that brought troops to Cambodia to overthrow the Khmer Rouge's rule in 1978, Vietnam was isolated and had to depend on support from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe politically, economically, and militarily. The above pressures forced the Vietnamese government to introduce a change in foreign policy at the 6th national party congress in 1986. There are two main reasons for the change in Vietnam's foreign policy. It was the domestic situation of Vietnam at this time a socioeconomic crisis arose and the influence of the new political thinking of the Soviet Union under Gorbachev (Amer, 1999).

Vietnam's foreign policy from 1986 to 1990, due to the above factors, both internal and external, made Vietnam change from an ideologically-heavy foreign policy to a foreign policy structure based on the national interest and a more pragmatic diplomacy. Vietnam has seen a shift in its perception of a world that is more interdependent and is no longer dominated by a divided worldview as it was before the demise of the Cold War. However, Thayer (2018, pp. 24) argues that main elite Vietnam's rule of law is still influenced by the old view when the Vietnamese political world constantly mentions the phrase "*threat of peaceful evolution*". However, after the 6th National Party Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) (December 1986), Vietnam made changes to its foreign policy when it set the goal of "taking advantage of favorable international *conditions for the cause of building socialism and defending the country.*"<sup>2</sup>, along with that is the implementation of the foreign policy "*maintain peace, develop economically*"<sup>3</sup> with foreign policy orientations of dialogue, avoiding confrontation in order to escape from the embargo and isolation as well as protect peace and development economic development (Nguyen Khac, 2011). These are the first steps in opening the door to non-socialist countries to invest after a long time dominated by the old view. In

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<sup>2</sup> Translated by the author

<sup>3</sup> Translated by the author

1989, Vietnam unilaterally withdrew all of its troops from Cambodia, helping to reduce international tensions and facilitate economic integration.

In the early 1990s, the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the collapse of the Eastern European socialist bloc was a significant loss for Vietnam (Nguyen Khac, 2011). At this time, Vietnam, more specifically the 7th Party Congress, established that its foreign policy orientation would embrace the international community: “*With an open foreign policy, we declare that: Vietnam wants to be friends with all countries in the world community, strive for peace, independence and development*”<sup>4</sup> (CPV, 2006, pp. 51). From this orientation, Vietnam has promoted multilateralism and diversification of relations, opening relations with many countries and international and regional organizations. With the view of being “*friends with all countries in the world community,*” Vietnam has completely abandoned ideological orientations; previous apprehensions and fears have also been replaced by a willingness to join forces and cooperate with all countries in the world. With this direction, Vietnam has achieved many successes in foreign affairs. Typically, it became a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum in 1994. Vietnam had its embargo lifted by the US and normalized relations with the US in 1995. Vietnam first participated in the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) in 1996. In addition, Resolution 8 of the 9th Central Committee also clearly defines Vietnam's “objects” and “partners”. Specifically, Vietnam's partners are countries that respect independence and sovereignty and wish to establish and build friendly, equal, and mutually beneficial relations with Vietnam. As for the subjects, there are countries that Vietnam needs to fight for resolutely, countries that seek to damage and infringe on Vietnam's territory and interests. In each object, there may still be sides that can be taken advantage of, and in some partners, there may still be differences and conflicts with Vietnam's interests. The above resolution shows the core nature of Vietnam's foreign policy is that it is willing to cooperate with all countries, but Vietnam will be selective, evaluating and consider each individual case. This shows that Vietnam's foreign thinking is increasingly consolidated and developed. Resolution 8 provides the basis for Vietnam's policy against China on the dispute in the East Sea<sup>5</sup>. At the same time, Vietnam is more open in its relations with the US when it allows US naval ships to visit Vietnamese ports (Thayer, 2018, pp. 31).

Vietnam has advocated for an open foreign policy, diversifying and embracing multilateral international relations and actively expanding international economic cooperation with many

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<sup>4</sup> Translated by the author

<sup>5</sup> South China Sea

countries. Vietnam's proactive global integration takes ASEAN as the focus for regional integration and interaction with multilateral institutions. Besides, Vietnam has also become a strategic partner with many influential countries in the region, such as India (2007), Japan (2009), then upgraded to an extensive strategic partner in 2014 and China (2008). And some countries outside the region, such as the United Kingdom (2010) and Germany (2011). Vietnam then continued to strengthen strategic partnerships with major countries such as China, the US, and India and achieved many significant results, such as in 2016 by US President Barack Obama lifted restrictions on the sale of lethal weapons and related services to Vietnam (Thayer, 2018). Through learning about the history of diplomatic development, it can be seen that Vietnam has succeeded in transforming its diplomatic methods and views. From ideological foreign policy when only relations with countries with the same ideology, to opening the door ready to “make friends” and cooperate with all states. The evolution in foreign policy after “Doi Moi” has contributed to economic development and enhanced Vietnam's position in the international arena (Le, 2018, pp. 7-12).

### **Vietnam's national and strategic interests in the current world and regional context**

Vietnam believes that the current global and regional context is multi-polar and multi-centered. The process of globalization makes countries unable to stand alone and compels them to interact with each other. This makes the strategy of competition, struggle, and cooperation between countries somewhat different. Great powers are increasingly competitive. The implementation of great powers' regional and international cooperation and competition strategies has created opportunities and challenges for small and medium powers. In international relations, there is extreme nationalism, protectionism, and imperialism. In addition, the world also faces traditional and non-traditional security problems such as terrorism, financial security, energy security, climate change, and epidemics.

Vietnam considers Southeast Asia a development center for the Indo-Pacific region and has a significant economic, political and strategic position. Vietnam assesses that regional dialogues such as the "Indo-Pacific," the "Belt and Road" initiative, and the "Look East" have positively impacted the stability and development of the Indo-Pacific region. However, the Indo-Pacific is still a place where competition for influence is fierce among the great powers. This is what destabilizes the region. The current hot issues in the region are the complicated territorial disputes leading to the risk of conflicts that destabilize and threaten the peace and development of the region. Non-traditional security issues such as terrorism, climate change, cyber security,

natural disasters, and epidemics are also issues that threaten regional peace, security, and stability. Vietnam recognizes that the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, based on the principles of the ASEAN Charter, plays an essential role in promoting economic, social, and cultural growth and mutual trust between the two countries in the region. Vietnam emphasized principles such as focusing on dialogue, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, and ensuring peace, security, cooperation, and development in Southeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific region. (Vietnam National Defense White Paper, 2019, pp.11-14).

Vietnam sees challenges in the current context as protectionism, economic competition, trade among great powers, and the reduced role of multilateral institutions that can affect its economy. Vietnam. Reactionary elements with plots against the Vietnamese state. Especially the plot to destroy the political and ideological foundation, eliminate the leadership role of the Communist Party and the socialist regime in Vietnam, plot to depoliticize the military. These issues create challenges for defense and homeland security. The tense and unstable situation in the East Sea poses challenges in protecting Vietnam's sovereignty, territory, peace, and stability. In the East Sea, the great power's unilateral actions imposed based on strength, regardless of international law, have infringed on Vietnam's interests and jurisdiction. Besides, the competition of great powers has turned the East Sea into an unstable and conflict-prone place. The final challenge for Vietnam is that non-traditional security issues such as terrorism, piracy, and transnational crime also destabilize Vietnam's social security and national defense (Vietnam National Defense White Paper, 2019, pp.19-21). Most of Vietnam's official documents and statements mention the importance of protecting Vietnam's national interests but do not specify those interests. In the 2019 Vietnam National Defense White Paper, it is mentioned that the important interests of Vietnam that the “all-people defense” contributes to the protection. There are “*firmly safeguarding independence, sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity; protect the country's sustainable peace; protect the Party, the state, the people and the socialist regime*” (Vietnam National Defense White Paper, 2019, pp.37). It can be said that these are the core national interests of Vietnam. Based on these interests, Vietnam has devised diplomatic and military strategies that can protect its national interests.

Regarding foreign affairs, Vietnam advocates pursuing the foreign policy of “*independence, self-reliance, diversification, multilateralisation, being a good friend and a reliable partner with all countries in the world. For the sake of peace, cooperation and development*” and “*our foreign policy is not to choose sides but to choose justice and right*” (Pham Minh Chinh, 2022). Vietnam actively engages with other global actors, considering it an important factor in

creating a peaceful, stable, and favorable environment for the country's development. Vietnam has continued to strengthen, consolidate and expand cooperative relations with countries in the region, as well as major powers. Moreover, Vietnam has actively participated in the world's joint efforts to solve global problems. Besides, Vietnam actively and actively promotes negotiations with neighboring countries to resolve territorial disputes on land and at sea. The above efforts of Vietnam aim to maintain a stable environment in the region and the world, create favorable conditions for the construction and development of the country, and enhance the prestige and position of Vietnam in the international arena.

Regarding national defense, Vietnam implemented a policy of national defense, including maintaining the leadership role of the Communist Party of Vietnam, resolutely pursuing the goal of national independence associated with socialism. Vietnam's defense strategy is a strategy of defense and mitigating military conflicts. But still, it develops military forces ready to resist wars of aggression and secure its capacity for self-defense. Therefore, Vietnam's defense policy is peaceful and focused on self-defense. The policy has the viewpoint of settling all disputes by peaceful means based on international law and preventing the risk of war. Vietnam does not join a military alliance or align itself with one country against another, does not allow another country to place military forces or use Vietnamese territory against another country, and does not use force or threaten the threat of force in international relations. In addition, Vietnam also strengthens defense cooperation to improve its ability to protect security. Vietnam will change its defense policy depending on the global and regional situation based on respect for independence, sovereignty, and territory, as well as basic principles of international law. The definition of "partner" and "object" is also repeated. Vietnam considers countries that respect independence and sovereignty, establish and expand friendly relations, and cooperate equally beneficial to Vietnam as a partner. Those forces that conspire and act against the goal of defending the country, abolishing the socialist regime, and infringing upon Vietnam's independence, sovereignty, territory, and national interests are the statute. To accomplish the above goals, Vietnam has developed defense cooperation relations with all countries, especially neighboring countries and strategic partners.

Moreover, the country is willing to join defense and security cooperation mechanisms in accordance with its capabilities and interests. Vietnam supports expanding cooperation among multilateral security mechanisms, taking ASEAN as the center and bases its actions on ASEAN's basic principles and standards. The issue of sovereignty disputes in the East Sea between Vietnam and China is advocated by Vietnam to be resolved by negotiation and seeking

a peaceful solution so as not to affect the peace, cooperation, and development of the two countries (National Defense White Paper, 2019).

### **Strategic proposal for Vietnam in the context of US-China competition in the Indo-Pacific**

Based on Vietnam's foreign and defense policies, Vietnam has the characteristics of a middle power, which is defined in the thesis' previous section. The country has always oriented multilateral policies, supported international and regional institutions, and supported regional peace and stability to facilitate the achievement of national development interests. In addition, Vietnam is ready to use its military force to resist invasions in order to protect the country, sovereignty, and national interests. Not only that, scholars such as Do (2022) and Erskine (2022) have commented that Vietnam is a middle power and capable of influencing powers. Based on the national strategies of the US and China, it can be seen that the US always wants to maintain a liberal world order led by the US. The history of American diplomatic strategy shows that the United States will always want to carry out its intention of universalizing liberal values to the countries of the order. Currently, the US views China as a revisionist country seeking to remove the US leadership role in the Indo-Pacific region. As for China, its diplomatic history shows that once China has an advantage in the international arena, the state will carry out aggressive activities that destabilize regional peace and stability (Mearsheimer, 2005). At present, when it has gained political and geographical advantages in the Indo-Pacific region, China aspires to become the economic center of the Indo-Pacific region by restructuring regional order and standing on par with the United States. Both try to entice countries in the region to increase their influence so that they can gain advantages in the Indo-Pacific. For Vietnam, it is necessary to have an assessment of the challenges and national interests to be able to come up with an appropriate strategy in the current context of the region. China and the US are both important economic partners for Vietnam. According to statistics in the first nine months of 2022, the two-way trade turnover of Vietnam and the US accounted for 17.2% of Vietnam's total import and export turnover with other countries was 558 billion USD. The US is currently the largest trading partner. Vietnam's second-largest trading partner and largest export market. Vietnam is the fifth largest trading partner of the US. In terms of exports, Vietnam ranks 6th in total export turnover to the US (Trang & Hung, 2022). Meanwhile, China is Vietnam's major trading partner, and Vietnam is China's sixth-largest trading partner (Baodientuvtv, 2021). Vietnam and China share Communist Party ideological values, but

Vietnam faces challenges in its relationship with China. The maritime territorial disputes with China over the Paracel Islands and the Spratly Islands and China's assertiveness are still a source of tension for Vietnam. China's unilateral deployment of military activities in the disputed maritime area has affected the national interest in terms of territorial integrity in Vietnam. However, for two reasons, Vietnam still cannot view China as an enemy and turn its relationship with China into hostility. The first is the difference in power and geographical position between Vietnam and China. If disputes lead to conflicts, the war will likely severely affect Vietnam. Second, China is Vietnam's leading economic partner. A broken relationship between Vietnam and China heavily affects the Vietnamese economy. However, with the increasing nationalism in Vietnam, it means that if Vietnam succumbs to unilateral moves, Chinese pressure will damage the legitimacy and reputation of the country. Communist Party to the Vietnamese people. Not only that, the East Sea has important strategic, economic and political nature. Vietnam's submission to China's pressure on the East Sea issue will cause considerable damage to Vietnam (Le, 2018). For these reasons, Vietnam needs to maintain a cooperative relationship with China to achieve economic benefits and avoid the risk of conflict. In addition, Vietnam needs to strongly condemn and oppose China's unilateral and pressured activities in the East Sea in the international arena in order to maintain the prestige and trust of the Vietnamese people and, at the same time, create a favorable environment struggling to protect Vietnam's interests in the East Sea.

The United States and Vietnam have common interests in maintaining bilateral relations of the Indo-Pacific order, the rise of China, and the central role of ASEAN in this regional architecture. Maintaining stability and bilateral and multilateral trade cooperation in the region and with the US helps Vietnam avoid dependence on China and helps the US create more influence in the region. Regarding the East Sea issue, Vietnam and the US share common concerns about an expanding China unilaterally exerting pressure on the sea. For Vietnam, the US is like a security provider for the region, easing pressure from China's aggressive actions. For the US, security cooperation with countries in the region helps to increase US influence and presence to ensure a stable US-led regional order. However, US-Vietnam relations have some problems. The US defines Vietnam's political structure as a one-party, authoritarian state ruled by the Communist Party of Vietnam and believes that the Vietnamese government does not prioritize human rights. The US also criticizes the human rights activities of Vietnam (Manyin & Martin, 2021). From the American perspective, it is clear that the Vietnamese government is going against American liberal values. The values that the US wants to spread



to the countries of the liberal US-led order. For Vietnam, maintaining the leadership of the Communist Party and protecting the socialist regime is in the national interest, so the US's imposition of American values in order to change Vietnam's political system was rejected by Vietnam. Nam considers it to infringe upon core interests. In addition, the US's condemnation of human rights activities in Vietnam is also considered by Vietnam as interfering in its internal affairs.

Faced with strategic choices to protect Vietnam's national interests in the region, including protecting its sovereign territory, protecting political institutions, and ensuring economic interests. Maintaining a balance between China and the US is essential when Vietnam needs China to achieve goals of great economic interests and share a political ideology. Vietnam needs the US to provide stable regional security, territorial integrity, and sovereignty at sea. While US-China competition is still not over, a hedging strategy is suitable for Vietnam, specifically: Vietnam should use the option of economic-pragmatism, binding-engagement, limited-bandwagoning with the US and China to the maximum economic interests and political interests, using economic-diversification to avoid over-dependence on these powers. Dominance-denial helps Vietnam avoid the increasing influence of China or the United States. As a middle-class country, Vietnam uses indirect-balancing to show its will and ability to defend its homeland if it perceives that its national interests are threatened. Finally, in case China shows that it is resolute in its military aggression towards Vietnam on the East Sea issue. Vietnam may consider the possibility of using soft-balancing.

## **VI. Conclusion**

This thesis has aimed to identify an appropriate strategy for Vietnam in the context of US-China competition in the Indo-Pacific region. The hedging strategy will help Vietnam maximize its national interests. Protect its national interests, protect the leadership of the Communist Party and the socialist regime, protect its sovereignty and territorial integrity, protect the people and the country and ensure economic interests stabilize the region. Comparison with the US and China's national interests and goals in the Indo-Pacific region can be seen. The United States remains eager to maintain leadership over its Indo-Pacific regional order. As it pivots its power toward the Asia-Pacific, expands its bilateral and multilateral partnerships, and actively participates in regional architecture building through regional cooperative institutions, the Indo-Pacific region. In addition, the United States still wishes to spread its liberal, democratic values. The US views China as a revisionist country and threatens US leadership in the region. China, through its tumultuous foreign policy history, China has

now become a great power in the Indo-Pacific region. China wants to restructure the Indo-Pacific region with China as the economic center. To do this, China has carried out economic, political, and military activities to exert its influence over countries in the region. In this competitive context, Vietnam needs to take advantage of the competition between China and the US through hedging to maximize its benefits. Achieve the economic, political, and security interests of the United States and China. At the same time, Vietnam needs to strengthen cooperation with countries inside and outside the region to avoid excessive dependence on the US or China. In addition, it is necessary to carry out military force construction to enhance the strength of a middle power that can protect itself and consider options for military cooperation if China is still resolute in its activities. Military aggression threatens the territory and sovereignty of Vietnam. This study wishes to contribute academically by briefly defining middle power, which helps make future research on the related topic easier, and quickly identify a country as small or medium power. In practice, based on defining and defining strategies for small and medium powers, the study is a document that contributes to helping countries' governments determine their positions and strategies in accordance with the status of their countries in the context of increasing power competition like today. However, the paper still has some limitations as these new definitions of small and medium power are likely to be controversial. The strategies recommended in the thesis may be appropriate only in the current context when the competition between the US and China has yet to end. Other studies are needed on future strategies for small and middle powers if the regional and world context changes due to the change in the balance of power in competition between great powers.

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