

Vietnam Defence Cooperation and National Security during Renovation (Doi Moi) Period

Major General Hong Quan NGUYEN^{*}

Abstract

Defence cooperation is an important part of the overall peace measures, contributing to improvement in national security. There have been a number of books and essays highlighting achievements of defence cooperation, but scope for achieving more comprehensive security is there. Through analysis, this article focuses on contribution of defence cooperation with neighbouring countries and some major powers towards Vietnam's national security during the Renovation (Doi Moi) period.

Keywords: *defence cooperation; national security; security belt; border; general patrol;*

Introduction

Vietnam made efforts to promote defence cooperation with neighbouring countries as well as some of the major powers during the Doi Moi period¹. World order is undergoing a lot of turbulence with countries carrying out strategic rebalance to retain relevance and their perceived rightful place in the comity of nations to meet their national objectives and aspirations. Efforts made for defence cooperation and achievements in improving Vietnam's national security are discussed in succeeding paragraphs.

Cooperation Between Vietnam and China

Immediately after normalising relations with China, cooperation between Vietnam and China's Ministries of Defence helped in quick recovery. Since 2010, the two defence ministries have held vice-ministerial level dialogues, conducted joint patrols in the area of

^{*}Major General Hong Quan NGUYEN, has done PhD in World History. He is working as a visiting Professor at Vietnam National Defence Academy (NDA). Earlier he had a tenure as Deputy Director General of the Institute for Defence Strategy (IDS), Ministry of Defence of Vietnam.

Gulf of Tonkin, established a communication channel between the two Navies and organised meetings of Commanders of border zones. The two sides signed Cooperation Protocol in October 2003. Through cooperation and confidence building measures, the two Armies succeeded in converting international borders into borders of peace, stability and friendship. The two sides have been cooperating in organising training, exchange of information and procurement of specialised equipment. Naval joint patrols are carried out twice a year in the area of Gulf of Tonkin. Joint exercises for search and rescue at sea are also organised. Border guards conduct joint patrols along land borders, settle border violations and prevent crimes.

There exists a maritime sovereignty dispute. Vietnam's Ministry of Defence frankly talks to the Chinese about sovereignty over the South China Sea and need to refrain from complicating matters and facilitating settlement peacefully. However, China has not abandoned its attempt to monopolise South China Sea and repeatedly violates sovereign rights over Vietnam's territorial waters and islands.

Vietnam - Laos Relations

Vietnam has improved relations with Laos. Cooperation with Lao People's Army through comprehensive implementation of annual protocol between the two countries has been enhanced. The focus is on improvement in technical information, training of personnel, treatment of wounded soldiers; searching and handing over mortal remains of Vietnamese martyrs who made supreme sacrifice of life during the War in Laos. Vietnam - Laos special defence relations are very important for Vietnam's national security. During the period of Doi Moi, Vietnam - Laos solidarity resulted in considerable mutual benefits. The two sides cooperated in training Laotian military cadres, educational institutions and agencies; while contributing positively to build emotional attachment and solidarity between the people of the two countries.

Through defence cooperation, Vietnam helped Laos to strengthen its national defence capabilities. Better military hardware and timely completion of military projects with help from Vietnam improved fighting capability of Laos Army. In response, the Lao Armed Forces prevented outside armed groups from violating Laos territory to create trouble in Vietnam. Laos helped Vietnam in protection of her western flank.

Vietnam - Cambodia Relations

In order to stabilise the Southwestern border, Vietnam promoted defence cooperation with Cambodia. In August 2002, Vietnam and the Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Army of Cambodia signed cooperation agreement. Vietnam helped Cambodian Armed Forces by repair of ships and boats and conducted training in the field of seach and location. Cambodian Armed Forces have been helping Vietnam in locating and sending mortal remains of those who made the supreme sacrifice of life during War in Cambodia.

The Vietnam military regions and the Border Guard force closely coordinate with the Cambodian Army to promptly solve problems that arise; enhance information exchange; prevent destructive activities of Viet Tan group and cross-border activities to include illegal smuggling and forest resources exploitation. The Vietnam Border Guards closely cooperate with Department of Public Security of Ministry of Home Affairs and the Royal Army officials in Cambodia to minimise criminal offences; undesirable activities and illegal trespassing. Since 2005, the two navies carry out joint patrolling in contiguous waters and maintain harmonious relations. Hundreds of Cambodian senior military officers have been trained in Vietnam. Every year, Vietnam medical units treat about 70 senior Cambodian military officers. Many medical teams visit and treat free-of-charge thousands of Cambodian people. Through defence cooperation, the two sides ensure solidarity and friendship and good relations.

Intra-ASEAN Cooperation

Vietnam has been exchanging military delegations and receiving naval vessels of ASEAN countries. It contributes to strengthening foreign investment and economic development. Defence cooperation with ASEAN countries has made an important contribution to protect national interests of Vietnam. Vietnam actively advocates central role for ASEAN at various forums. In Vietnam's perception, ASEAN facilitates cooperation among ASEAN member countries and contributes to collective security and economic development.

Partnership with the United States of America (US)

The Ministry of Defence of Vietnam is actively interacting with American heirarchy to accept moral responsibility and help in

mitigating the ill effects of war. Efforts are being made through defence cooperation to improve bilateral relations to the level of comprehensive partnership. Vietnam is actively cooperating with the US for taking anti-terrorist measures and participates in International Military Education and Training (IMET) programme; promotes cooperation in other fields such as:

- (a) Defence Cooperation Agreement (9/2011).
- (b) Statement of Common Vision on Bilateral Defence Relations (June 2015).
- (c) Memorandum of Defence Cooperation between the two countries.
- (d) In July 2015, Vietnam adopted the action plan for cooperation in the field of United Nations Peace Keeping operations.

Taking advantage of the US assistance, Vietnam gradually improved its capacity to protect maritime sovereignty; expanded intelligence cooperation and security. Defence cooperation has led to removal of embargo on supply of lethal weapons to Vietnam by the US. Besides, Vietnam takes advantage of the US humanitarian assistance, projects being carried in difficult areas². Official visits of defence ministers of the two countries on reciprocal basis has facilitated better understanding and cooperation between the two countries.

Vietnam - Russia Relations

Vietnam is importing military hardware from Russia. In certain cases transfer of technology is part of the contract. This is helping in enhancing operational capability of Vietnam Armed Forces. Defence cooperation is an essential part of Vietnam-Russia strategic partnership.

Defence Cooperation with India

In 10 years of strategic partnership, Vietnam and India have made great progress. Both countries share a common perception of conventional and non-traditional threats and security challenges. The objective of the Vietnam-India Defence and Strategic partnership is to promote peace and stability in the region.

Conclusion

Since Vietnam entered the Doi Moi period, defence cooperation has actively implemented the guidelines laid down and has obtained very important results, contributing to creating a protective belt; improving relations with world's leading countries and political centres; contributing to maintaining a favourable international environment, promoting socio-economic development; promoting national security and expanding international cooperation.

Endnotes

1 "Renovation" (Doi Moi) is the name given to the economic reforms initiated in Vietnam in 1986 with the goal of creating a "socialist-oriented market economy". The term "Doi Moi" itself is a general term with wide use in the Vietnamese language. However, the Doi Moi Policy (Chính sách Đổi Mới) refers specifically to these reforms. The communist government adopted a command economy at its inception. Under the command economy, the central government decided output targets and prices, input supplies, domestic wholesale and retail trade, and international trade; the state was aiming at creating a vertically integrated economy where there was no commercial contact among individual production units horizontally. In the agricultural sector, the government formed cooperatives in three stages; production solidarity groups, lower-level cooperatives where land and equipment were shared, and higher-level cooperatives in which a system of workpoints determined distribution of all income. However, the command economy was abolished by the late 1980s following the 6th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam.

2 This project has been built in Thua Thien Hue (8 clinics) province, Quang Tri province (1 primary school, 2 centres for handicapped children and 1 clinic), Quang Nam province (1 flood management centre) , Da Nang City (1 primary school), Nghe An province (1 primary school), Lai Chau province (1 clinic) each project ranges in size from 50,000 to 300,000 USD. Before 2010, the Ministry of Defence of Vietnam allowed USPACOM to implement the "Angel of the Pacific" programme, focusing on common medical treatment for the people. Since 2011, Vietnam has allowed USPACOM to implement the "Pacific Solidarity" programme in place of the Angel of Pacific in Ha Tinh province, focusing on basic construction and upgrading of schools and clinics on a large scale, using less contractors and more military personnel.

References

1. Foreign Relations Department (2009), Foreign Relations Department's 45 year (1964 – 2009), Ed. People's Army Publishing House, Hanoi.

2. Ministry of National Defence (2010), Vietnam White Paper of Defence, Ed. People's Army Publishing House, Hanoi.
3. Ministry of National Defence (2011), ASEAN's Defence-Military Conferences in the 2010, Hanoi.
4. NGUYEN Hong Quan (2019), Vietnam's Defence Foreign Relations in the International Integration Erea, Ed. People's Army Publishing House, Hanoi.