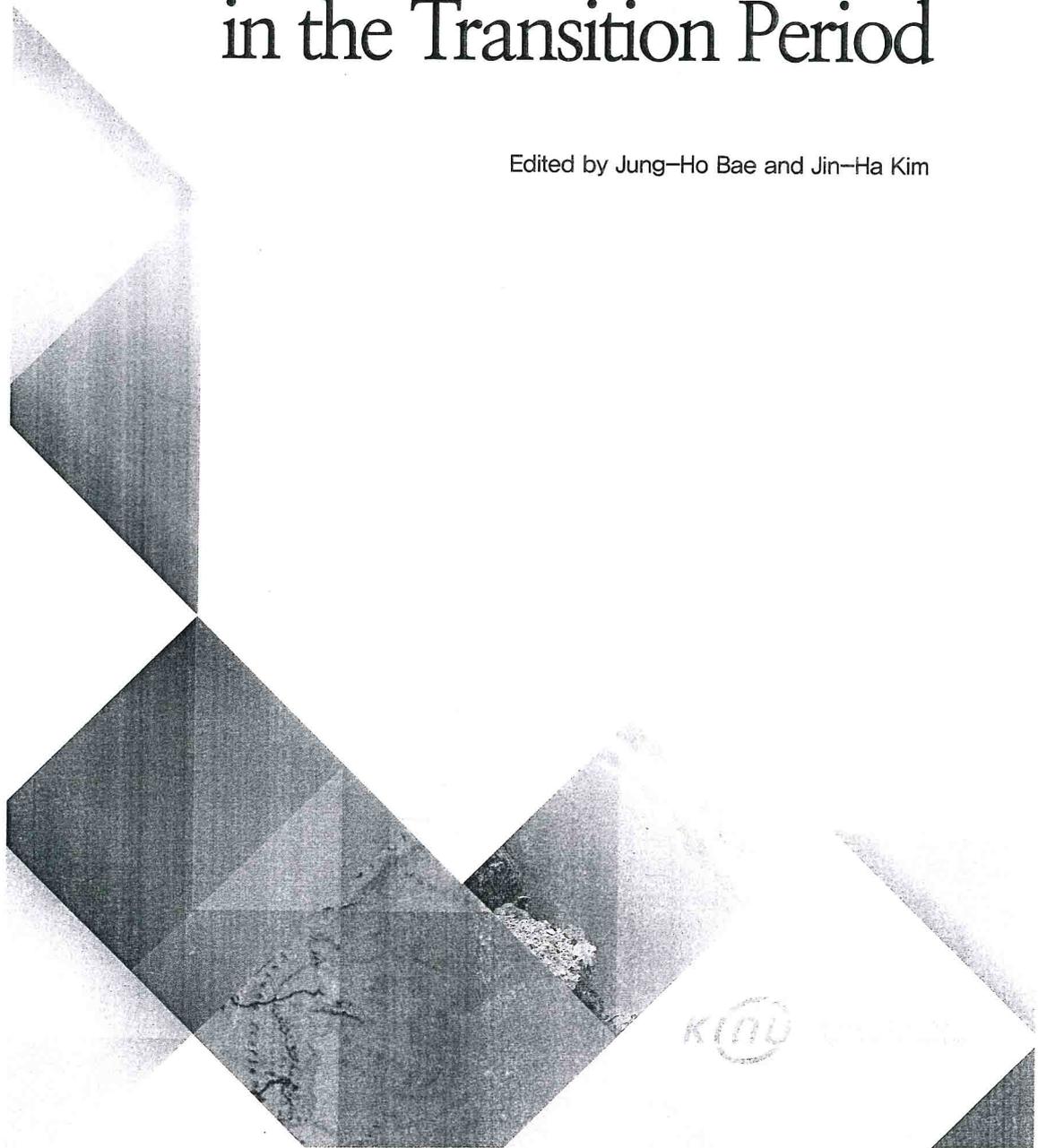


China's Strategic Environment and External Relations in the Transition Period

Edited by Jung-Ho Bae and Jin-Ha Kim



IX. Myanmar's Reforms and Opening the New Chapter with ASEAN

1. Myanmar's wave of reform

The government has been simultaneously implementing the four reform measures: political, socio-economy, administrative reform and private sector reform since it took office in 2011. It has now been implementing waves by waves. The first wave was in an early 2011 starting with new political system. Priority went national integration and new political culture. They included granting of amnesties to prisoners, the coming back with dignity of the exiled political forces. The government had granted amnesty to over 28,000 prisoners during the first-year term with the aim of ensuring all-inclusive opportunity in national reconsolidation and national building tasks.³²⁴

One of the achievements in the first wave of reform is the government's "all-inclusive political process" for all the stakeholders to have a place in the political process. The meeting of President U Thein Sein and National League for Democracy(NLD) leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi had taken place and reached agreement to work for the interest of Myanmar people, leaving aside the differences. In line with this, the government has amended

³²⁴- *Global New light of Myanmar*, October 8, 2014.

political party registration Act.³²⁵ According to this amendment, was allowed to take part in by-election which was held on April 1st, 2012. The political parties were enjoying more political space that is non-existence before.

In the first wave of reform, Myanmar has also undertaken to achieve a long lasting peace in the country with three steps. It has been over sixty years that the conflicts have emerged in our Myanmar since independence. The first step is to hold the dialogue at state level. In this level both sides must stop all hostilities, stay only at the agreed areas, not to hold arms in any other places except from those agreed areas, open liaison offices in the mutually agreed places, and fix the venue, time and date for Union level dialogue. Second step is the Union level. The points to be discussed at this step are to secede from the Union by no means, cooperate in economic development tasks, cooperate in elimination of narcotic drugs, take part in political process following setting up political parties, At the third step, agreement will be signed at the Parliament(Hluttaw) comprising all main political players like the government, national race leaders, political parties and political forces and people's representatives.³²⁶

At the international arena, the changing dimension of Myanmar's foreign policy can be seen under new elected Government took

³²⁵. The State Peace and Development Council Law No. 2, March 2010.

³²⁶. Burma News International, *Deciphering Myanmar's Peace Process: A Reference Guide 2013* (Thailand: Wanida Press, January 2013), pp. 37~39.

office in March 2011. When Myanmar is at the beginning of a new era of socio-political change, the U.S. seem to change their policy towards Myanmar. A series of diplomatic moves and domestic developments underline Myanmar's intension to foster better relations with any major powers. The European Union sent a "positive signal" by lifting sanctions on the country and continued its support for the ongoing reforms in Myanmar and look forward to developing a new and cooperative relationship. Besides these new trends of relations with the Western countries, Myanmar developed the relations with its old friends such as Japan, China and India for the creation of the new opportunities and more options.

Myanmar's reform process in the first wave appeared to be successful to some extent especially in the political sector such as positive meeting of President and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the contest of NLD in 2012 and the initiation of peace process with many ethnic groups and opening new chapter in international arena.

In mid-2013, Myanmar proceeded to second wave which put emphasis on roadmap for politico-socio economy reforms, administrative sector reform and private sector. The key in this stage of political reform is to create a new form of political culture to utilize peaceful negotiation and to avoid conflict with political forces. Dialogues and negotiations with ethnic minority groups were taken place. Legislative reform was also remarkable

achievement. To cope with new political system, more than hundred bills were discussed at the parliamentary sessions and passed with the short period of reform.

For administrative reform, on August 10, 2013, President U Thein Sein delivered speech at the meeting with union ministers, region/state chief ministers and deputy ministers at Nay Pyi Taw, the capital of Myanmar. In order to ensure the good governance and clean government, the government has retired and transferred some senior government officials including Union ministers. Deputy Ministers and Director-Generals were also taken action against them due to poor performance, lack of transparency, lack of responsibility and accountability in dealing with the public. Myanmar acceded to United Nations Convention on Anti-Corruption on December 20, 2012. In line with this Myanmar has established Anti-Corruption Committee headed by Vice-President. A system for public participation in anti-corruption was conducted through media. Altogether 450 officials are taken action including ministerial level.³²⁷ The national reform leading committee, led by the President has been formed separately to direct efforts on reform programme instead of tasking the project commission with designing and guiding reform plans in the past.

³²⁷-Myo Khaing Swe, "Anti-Corruption Efforts in Myanmar," *The United Nations Asia and Far East Institute for the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders (UNAFEI)*, March 2014, p. 256.



While encouraging the promotion of the private sector in economy, Myanmar is conducting institutional reforms for capacity building of state owned businesses. Changes and reforms are also taking place in collaboration with international organizations for the flourishing of capital market and financial markets as well as for the emergence of conglomerates. Myanmar is promoting the role of private sector seeking valuable advice and suggestions from local and foreign experts in the economic field.

This will help not only to develop the GDP but also improve the people's living standard and the public services. At present, Myanmar's GDP ranks 21st in Asia. Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam and Singapore are all high above Myanmar. Myanmar GDP per capita PPP among the world is at 201 with \$1,400. Myanmar receives foreign direct investment, \$36 billion in which ASEAN countries portion is about \$13 billion.³²⁸ These statistic show Myanmar is in need of great efforts to improve its investment. After lifting sanctions from the West based on the political development, Myanmar will increase GDP with no doubt.

Moreover, Myanmar is a gateway for the BIMSTEC and SAARC. As Myanmar is strategically located in Asia, she could improve its basic economic fundamentals and infrastructure and learns from its neighbours and other economic clubs. It is on the

³²⁸- Asian Development Bank, *Asian Development Outlook 2014: Asia in Global Value Chain* (Philippines: Asian Development Bank, 2014).

cross road of China's Outward Policy on the one hand and India's Look East Policy on the other. For Myanmar, located on the southern tip of Indochina peninsula, possesses an important strategic location on the blinks of Indian Ocean and Bay of Bengal, the significant gateway for China to Indo-Pacific regional order.

The President declared third wave of reforms with two portions; one is an immediate objective and another is for the long term objective. The rule of law and laying foundations are the core objective to be undertaken as a long term objective. The immediate plan will pay more attention to for benefit of people for socio-economic condition. In line with this the government carried out National Comprehensive Development Plan.³²⁹ Another positive development in the political arena was the political dialogue of the leaders of five national political forces which took place at the Presidential Palace on October 31, 2014. Three main agendas which were proposed by the President are: continuation of democratic transition, strengthening the peace process and 2015 election.³³⁰ There came out criticism for this dialogue due to limited time for individual speakers and as a show before President Obama visit to attend the 25th ASEAN Summit. However, if there is a follow up political dialogue in the short period of third wave, it is expected to have a bright future for Myanmar.

³²⁹- *The New Light of Myanmar*, January 20, 2013.

³³⁰- *Global New Light of Myanmar*, November 1, 2014.

In international arena, she regained her prestige to assume ASEAN chairmanship. Becoming a Chairman of ASEAN on January 1, 2014, Myanmar represents one of the major steps in re-engagement with the world community. Myanmar's reform in the period of third wave was criticized by both by local and international community due to her slow process. However, it is difficult to compare with other countries like China, Vietnam and Korea. They had a strong economic foundation and had no political instability like Myanmar.

2. Myanmar in early years of ASEAN membership

During the cold war period, Myanmar paid little attention to regionalism. However, facing the reality of post cold war international relations, Myanmar had enhanced unity and cohesion, strengthened competitiveness and deep integration. To live together in peace and harmony within the family of nations and to work together the interests of the whole region, Myanmar looks forward to regional development. Moreover, the growing trend of interdependence among nations stressed the needs for regional cooperation for the common peace and prosperity of the region as well as for each individual nation in the region. At the same time, ASEAN has also striven for full regional integration based on the principle of constructive engagement and non-interference in the internal affairs for regional peace, stability

and prosperity. ASEAN principle known as “ASEAN Way” was in line with the comfort level of Tatmadaw(military) government. Therefore, the sweeping changes in international and regional condition and trends as well as in Myanmar’s domestic priorities and directions opened new opportunities for Myanmar to integrate into regional organizations and cooperate with its regional neighbours.

Most senior officials’ opinion on Myanmar’s decision to join ASEAN comes from two folds: politically, membership would contribute to peace and stability of ASEAN region, better confidence-building measures among member-states, a way out of its isolation. From economic point of view, Myanmar’s membership would expand its already substantial economic space and would increase trade and investment links within the region. Thus the country and the region would achieve greater development that would lead to increased efficiency among other benefits.

Soon after joining, Myanmar faced the problem of some ASEAN countries attempting to change the ASEAN way. For the chair of ASEAN in 2006, Myanmar was under pressured and faced with criticism from various factions. The U.S. and the European Union publicly announced that they might boycott any ASEAN-related event if Myanmar was the chair. In this regard, Myanmar voluntarily agreed to skip its turn as chairman of ASEAN in 2006 and ASEAN foreign ministers agreed at the

time to let Myanmar assume the chairmanship when it was ready.³³¹

3. New Myanmar and ASEAN

Myanmar's relationship with ASEAN is related with Myanmar's domestic reforms. Myanmar, as a member of ASEAN, maintains friendly relations with all the countries in the region with a strong commitment to achieve regional peace and stability. Being a founding member of the Non Aligned Movement, the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence are firmly to adhere to as principle guidelines in its international relations.³³² Changes and developments have taken place on March 30, 2011 when the new government initiated adopting and implementing policy programs and work plans for the emergence of peaceful, modern developed democratic nation. Along with these changes, Myanmar is assuming ASEAN Chairmanship in 2014. Following the positive political developments in Myanmar, ASEAN leaders agreed that Myanmar would assume the ASEAN chairmanship in 2014. The issue of whether to grant Myanmar for 2014 ASEAN chair was one of the top agenda items at the ASEAN

³³¹- Maung Aung Myoe, "Regionalism in Myanmar's Foreign Policy: Past, Present and Future." *Asia Research Institute Working paper*, No. 73 (September 1, 2006), p. 23.

³³²- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Myanmar, *History and Activities* (Yangon: Training, Research and Foreign Languages Department, 2005).

member states. The Myanmar government's request for 2014 ASEAN chairmanship was widely seen as part of its effort to gain domestic and international legitimacy after assuming power in March 2011. In November 2011, ASEAN agreed with Myanmar to chair the group's summits and related meetings in 2014 for the first time since it joined the bloc in 1997.

Becoming a Chairman of ASEAN on January 1, 2014 represents another major step in Myanmar's re-engagement with the world community. As Chairman, Myanmar has been closely involved in seeking solutions and compromises with regard to sensitive political, social and economic issues facing ASEAN within itself, and in its relations with major powers in the region and in the rest of the world. A greater awareness of these issues will be useful for Myanmar in fulfilling its duty as Chairman. To become a modern democratic nation, Myanmar must be reintegrated into the regional and world economy. Reintegration at the regional level requires Myanmar to get back onto the growth path of the Asia and Pacific region.

Taking up the responsibility of Chairman of ASEAN in 2014 Myanmar faced both opportunities and challenges. The impact of ASEAN Chairmanship to Myanmar can be three folds: political, economic and social. From the political point of view, three meetings are especially important being a chairmanship. They are the 47th ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting, the ASEAN-U.S. meeting and the ASEAN-China talks. Myanmar wants

them to play a major role in ASEAN economically and politically and Myanmar welcomes their reengagement with it and the shift in U.S. policy towards Myanmar. It does not want to create unnecessary tensions with other regional countries. Regarding the ASEAN-China meeting, Myanmar has to reduce tensions in the South China Sea. It has to build up the mechanism for implementing the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea.³³³

Hosting as chairmanship, Myanmar has an opportunity to demonstrate its “independent” foreign policy and provide a path for the country’s future policy direction. Myanmar has shown her unity in speaking with one voice with regard to South China Sea issue. Concerning with South China Sea territorial disputes, Myanmar government had a question to address on bilateral relations with China in the ASEAN-China meeting as some ASEAN countries keep pressuring the host country to issue a statement. This is because, during the Chairmanship of Cambodia, a close ally with China failed to do so. China skillfully convinced Cambodia to block a joint statement, losing ASEAN’s centrality. The current question is whether Myanmar could present a good image. Myanmar, however, had tried to balance its position as ASEAN chair though currently China is not a popular with Myanmar public due to lack of corporate social responsibility in

³³³. *The New Light of Myanmar*, August 9, 2014, p. 4.

most Chinese investment areas. However, governmental levels, academia and many analysts in China-Myanmar relations are suggesting that Myanmar ought to be fair between China and ASEAN without taking sides.

Myanmar has shown her Myanmar's way in addressing or standing on SCS issue. Once Myanmar had practiced "Burmese way to socialism," but now she is going with "Myanmar's way to democracy." Myanmar has to build up the mechanism for implementing the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea. She was working on the full implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea as well as working on the Code of Conduct. Myanmar has shown her uniqueness with ASEAN. China will not gain her diplomatic victory like in Cambodian chairmanship and it is unlikely to give pressure on Myanmar. The reason is that (1) China is losing trust since Cambodian chairmanship, and (2) if China put pressure on Myanmar, it will be more difficult to normalize their relationship that has declined since 2011.

The question of whether Myanmar can host chairmanship was raised among the international as well as Myanmar political observers. Among them, a prominent scholar Yun Sun point out her view positive on ASEAN chairmanship that Myanmar had successfully carried out its role as ASEAN chair.³³⁴ Moreover,

³³⁴- Yun Sun, "Myanmar's ASEAN Chairmanship," *Stimson Center*, Issues Brief, No. 5 (September 2014).

ASEAN Secretary-General Le Luong Minh expressed optimism about Myanmar's ability to provide leadership to the Association at this critical stage of ASEAN's Community building. His comment is "Myanmar success is ASEAN's success."³³⁵ To appreciate ASEAN's success, Myanmar keeps on her reform process.

Myanmar's ASEAN chairmanship would have some impact on domestic issues rather than international such as democracy benchmark, election, peace process, human rights etc. One of the remarkable events before the convening of the 25th ASEAN Summit is the meeting of Commander-in-chief and the Press Council. Press Council has met with President twice and had reached an agreement to meet with information Minister once a month. Both sides exchanged view on strengthening of mutual cooperation between the armed forces and media for speedy flow of correct information and building of mutual trust and understanding.³³⁶ This is one of the steps forward to Myanmar democratic consolidation. Improvement of press freedom is noticeable although there remain some issues to be addressed.

With regard to election, it can be expected some promises of free and fair election in 2015 from the Myanmar government. The Chairman of the Union Election Commission had officially announced for free and fair election in November 2015 and this

³³⁵- *The New Light of Myanmar*, May 11, 2014.

³³⁶- *Global New Light of Myanmar*, October 15, 2014.

announcement come before the Summit. It is a positive consequence of the summit on domestic democratic transformation. Here, some may see the cancellation of by election recently announced by Union Election Commission from negative point of view. Election which was scheduled to be held in November after ASEAN meetings was cancelled. Actually, it is better for all contesting parties to take time for their preparations. Moreover, political parties will face financial and political constraints as a result of standing for two separate elections.

Human right of Myanmar is always eyed by the international community. As Myanmar will preside over the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights, there are some positive aspects such as release of political prisoners and release of child recruits from Myanmar military.³³⁷ This had come out five days before President Obama's announcement to keep Myanmar on the list of nations that are subject to U.S. sanctions over the use of child soldiers.

The other dominating topic at the Summit was the establishment of ASEAN Community. Myanmar is hosting in the time of ASEAN's entering the final stretch before the ASEAN Community 2015. ASEAN has a deadline to meet end in 2015. The Nay Pyi Daw Declaration on "Realization of the ASEAN Community by 2015" was released in May Summit.³³⁸ The post-2015 ASEAN

³³⁷- *Mizzima News*, October 13, 2014.

³³⁸- *The New Light of Myanmar*, May 12, 2014.

community vision must also be worked out. In this regard, Myanmar is working together with ASEAN member countries.

From economic point of view, a bright impact can be seen. A good performance as Chairman offers a unique opportunity for reintegration of Myanmar into the regional and world economy. Joining ASEAN has increased investment from both ASEAN member and non-ASEAN member countries. The ASEAN Business Outlook Survey was recently released on August 28, 2014 at the ASEAN Economic Ministers Meeting in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar. It shows that Myanmar is one of the most popular countries for business expansion in ASEAN, offering a ready supply of affordable labour and personal security. Myanmar's workforce are generally satisfied with living and working conditions as 91% report satisfaction with their assignments and 77% attempt to extend their time in the country. In addition, U.S. companies are viewed more favorably in Myanmar than in any other country in ASEAN.

According to the data of ASEAN statistics, the combined GDP of the East Asia Summit(EAS) participating countries grew by 0.9% in 2012~2013 compared to the 5.3% growth recorded in 2011~2012. The combined GDP of EAS participating countries stood at \$39,813.3 billion in 2013. ASEAN's total trade with the non-ASEAN and EAS countries was expanded by 1.6% from \$1,082.1 billion in 2012 to \$1,099 billion in 2013. The eight non-ASEAN and EAS countries accounted for 43.8% of ASEAN's

total trade. Foreign Direct Investment(FDI) inflows from the non-ASEAN countries in 2013 reached \$64.3 billion, or 52.2% of ASEAN's total FDI inflows, according to the data of ASEAN statistics.³³⁹

The respondents do not believe that the goals of the AEC will be reached until 2020 or later. Still, two thirds of the respondents in Myanmar indicate that their company's level of trade and investment in ASEAN has increased in the past two years and expect this trend to continue in the next five years. Although not dark impact, it would be a great challenge for Myanmar's SMEs. They are to join the ASEAN common market in 2015 so as to compete with that of ASEAN countries. In this case, Myanmar is very much lack behind other ASEAN countries. Myanmar entrepreneurs will definitely face difficulties when AEC come. It is no doubt that they cannot play in level playing fields for the time being. Myanmar still needs to implement the local SMEs development because of unskilled labour, financial and technical constraints, said by some businessmen and entrepreneurs. Another issue is that SMEs are receiving very low amount of loans. This will not be effective for local SMEs. According to the ASEAN SME Policy Index 2014, the highest index is 5.4 and the ASEAN average index is 3.7 while Myanmar's index stands at 2.9. Weak financial support available

³³⁹- Asian Development Bank, *Myanmar and Transition: opportunities and challenges* (Philippines: Asian Development Bank, August 2012).

from banks is a major hindrance to the development of small-and-medium-scale enterprises in Myanmar. Small and Medium Industrial Development Bank(SMIDB) had lent the amount of Kyat 10 billion to 62 industries so far and it is planning to lend Kyats 20 billion to SMEs. It is impossible to provide financial assistance to all SMEs in the country by SMIDB alone. There are more than 100,000 SMEs including over 45,000 small and medium industries in Myanmar. Most importantly, recent high land price may threaten the narrowing the developmental gap.³⁴⁰

Myanmar is still weak in hardware as well as software infrastructure for economic integration process. For hardware, her basic infrastructure needs are not met with ASEAN standards in various sectors such as road systems, electric power, and so on. For software, rules and regulations on import and export are needed to upgrade or modify in accordance with the ASEAN standards.

Another impact of Myanmar's chairmanship is hosting of ASEAN People's Forum(APF) which can be said social impact. Myanmar's commitment to put ASEAN's vision to become people-centered community into real action and policies can be seen by hosting the first APF. It was the largest regional civil society conference held in Myanmar in contemporary history. As Civil Society Organizations are playing important role in state

³⁴⁰- *Eleven Media*, September, 2014.

building process, this event is important milestone for Myanmar's transition and for the ASEAN Community 2015. There were more than 1000 participants from different levels of Civil Society from across the ASEAN region. Participants from Myanmar had opportunities to channel the voice of the grassroots civil societies of different backgrounds from across the region. Since Myanmar has the 2014 ASEAN chair, the responsibility of hosting the ASCC/APF has fallen to the shoulder of the Myanmar civil society.³⁴¹

4. Conclusion

It is always true that reforms never run smooth. The road of reforms had to encounter with difficulties and challenges. In such a situation, Myanmar's third wave of reform coincides with ASEAN Chairmanship. Myanmar's ASEAN chairmanship can be assessed with three "O": open, opportunity and obstacles. Together with openness, opportunities have been arising and support from the world community. The chairmanship comes admits the country's ongoing democratization and reform process which has been enjoying strong support from ASEAN member states. However, the obstacles will also need to be kept in mind.

Myanmar in a transition period has dual responsibility; to

³⁴¹- Alex James, Debbie Stothard and Khim Ohamar (eds.), *ASEAN Civil Society Conference and ASEAN People's Forum 2014* (Yangon: Sean Civil Society Conference/ASEAN People's Forum, 2014).

meet the needs of domestic and at the same time chairing ASEAN. In this situation, Myanmar as a Chair has taken the responsibility in line with ASEAN norms and values. Although Myanmar has some domestic issues to be addressed, it cannot be denied that Myanmar has contributed to her theme of “Moving Forward in Unity to a Peaceful and Prosperous Community” to certain extent. Myanmar has shown her uniqueness in a very sensitive issue of SCS. With some major reforms in political and economic systems, Myanmar is now entrusted with a more active role to play in regional and international affairs. This fulfills the dignity of ASEAN, Myanmar will be closely involved in seeking solutions and compromises with regard to sensitive political, social and economic issues facing ASEAN within itself, and in its relations with major powers in the region and in the rest of the world.

X. Learning from the Past: Vietnamese Foreign Policy in a Changing World³⁴²

On July 27, 1995 the ceremony to admit Vietnam into Association of Southeast Asian Nations(ASEAN) took place in Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei. This even was multiple meaning for Vietnam and world community. In general, this marked a new page in the history of Vietnam's foreign relations, transforming from a model heavily influenced by ideological factors to the one that focused now more on national interest. In this context, it is reasonable to look back how modern Vietnamese foreign policy during the Cold War and since its end was shaped. Here, I argue that like during the Cold War, Vietnam can balance its relations with great powers based on historical lessons as it could successfully engage both the Soviet Union and China and managed to secure support from both of them notwithstanding serious problems between them. Several countries, especially in Southeast Asia, are confronted with the same dilemma as Vietnam, i.e., managing their relations with the U.S. on one hand, which had been instrumental in keeping the region stable,

³⁴²- This paper is the outcome of a research project entitled "Regionalism: Theoretical and Practical Issues" supported by the National Foundation for Science and Technology Development(NAFOSTED) of Ministry of Science and Technology of Vietnam. I would like to thank the NAFOSTED for its valuable support.

and China, a rising power that is offering huge economic opportunities, on the other, although Vietnamese case is unique one.

1. “All Men Are Born Free”

Locating on the crossroad of civilizations, considering the life-line connecting two oceans, and having rich natural resources, from the beginning Vietnamese history was characterized with dynamic movements. During its early existence, “Vietnamese identity interacted over a thousand years with Chinese, Cham, Khmer, French and stateless people of the [Indo-Chinese] peninsula.”³⁴³ Later on, starting in XVI century lasting until XX century all Southeast Asian countries except Thailand experienced Western colonial occupation. Many modern western ideas, practices and institutions were actually transferred from Europe to Southeast Asia during colonial time. However, they were adapted to Southeast Asian context, and became localized through nationalism. In Vietnam, it was Ho Chi Minh who could unite different political groups of Vietnam in 1930 to establish the Vietnam Communist Party. He was also the person who quoted the Declaration of Independence of the U.S. “all men are created equal” and the Declaration of the French Revolution’s “all

³⁴³- Nhung Tuyet Tran and Anthony Reid (eds.), *Vietnam–Borderless Histories* (Wisconsin: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), p. 3.

men are born free” for Vietnamese Declaration of Independence to establish Democratic Republic of Vietnam(DRV) on September 2, 1945.³⁴⁴

Because of the long colonial occupation, the bird of independent states in Southeast Asia by the end and after the Second World War(WWII), its existence and development during the Cold War became a central theme. If one glimpsed at Vietnamese history from 1945 until recently, one would be no doubt in the influences of the Cold War and the big powers on the history of country. It was very big powers that determined the political development of Vietnam and Southeast Asia after the WWII. Realized that the major powers would play an important role in the fate of his nation, in his declaration of Vietnam’s independence on September 2, 1945, Ho Chi Minh called them to recognize the independence of Vietnam and defense its sovereignty:

“We are convinced that the Allied nations which at Teheran and San Francisco have acknowledged the principles of self-determination and equality of nations will not refuse to acknowledge the independence of Vietnam.”³⁴⁵

In comparison with the other parts of Southeast Asia and Europe, Vietnam was influenced very early by the Cold war and Yalta’s bipolarity system. On the following days of September

³⁴⁴- Ho Chi Minh, *Vietnam’s Declaration of Independence* (Hanoi: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1962), pp. 17~21.

³⁴⁵- Ho Chi Minh, *Vietnam’s Declaration of Independence*, p. 21.

and October 1945, when the British arrived in Saigon and the Chinese Nationalist troops came to Hanoi, pursuant to the agreement at Potsdam to disarm the defeated Japanese forces, but in fact to assist the French in resuming control over Indochina, the independence that Vietnamese just declared became threatened. Facing with this complicated situation, the Provisional Government of the DRV made public the Communiqué on the Foreign policy on October 3, 1945. In the first official statement on its foreign policy the Provisional Government emphasized “the main object of (Vietnam’s) foreign policy is to ensure the victory of the nation by peaceable or forcible means, according to the attitude evinced by the foreign powers, but always in accordance with the Atlantic Charter.”³⁴⁶

Following this fundamental orientation, during 1946~1947, with the approval of the government of Thailand and the support of oversea Vietnamese there, an office of representation with a diplomatic status of the DRV was set up in Bangkok on April 14, 1947. Beside this, Government of Thailand headed by Premier Minister Pridi Panomyon also provided Vietnam with money and weapons, and allowed to establish a war base at the frontier for training of troops to be sent to Vietnam.³⁴⁷ In February

³⁴⁶- Nguyen Dinh Bin (ed.), *Ngoai giao Viet Nam 1945-2000 (Vietnam's Diplomacy 1945-2000)* (Hanoi: National Political Publishing House, 2002), pp. 49~50.

³⁴⁷- Luu Van Loi, *50 nam ngoai giao Viet Nam 1945-1995 (50 years of Vietnam's Diplomacy)* (Hanoi: The Gioi Publishing House, 2006), p. 98.

1948, another office of information with diplomatic status was also established in Rangoon. The Burmese government helped with all expenses of the office, and offered some weapons for the struggle of Vietnam against French colonialists. Although these offices existed for very short time between 1947~1948, they played an important role in bridging Vietnam with outside world. It was more important in the context that Vietnam was not recognized by other countries, and had to fight alone in siege.

Influenced by the confronted ideology during the Cold War followed in the next decades, Vietnam became a battlefield between major powers, France supported by the U.S. on the one hand, and People Republic of China(PRC) and Soviet Union on the other hand. The year 1950 made a turning point in the history of Vietnam's foreign relations. After four years of fighting in the siege, the DRV was recognized by PRC, Soviet Union and other socialist countries in the Spring of 1950. Since then, Vietnam became more connected with communist block than with Southeast Asian countries, except Laos and Cambodia. However, it was also a big challenge for Vietnam's foreign policy.

2. At the crossfire: Vietnam between Soviet Union and China

Vietnam's relations with China and the Soviet Union during the war(1954~1975) could be described as a triangular framework

Part 1
Part 2
Part 3

because each of the bilateral links—Vietnam-Soviet Union, Vietnam-China and China-Soviet Union—was affected by the third bilateral relationship of the triangle. China's policy toward Vietnam must be understood in the context of its goals vis-à-vis the the U.S. and Soviet Union. China hoped the war would weaken the U.S., while simultaneously hoping to prevent the expansion of Soviet-American rapprochement. China tried, concomitantly, to avoid both an enlarged war and negotiations to end the war. In fact, China ultimately promoted a prolonged war of attrition for all the involved participants. For Vietnam, China was an ally, a supplier of troops and military hardware and a deterrent against a possible U.S. invasion of the North, but also a much stronger neighbor who might ultimately begin to take advantage of its great size to push Vietnam into a subordinate status.

In comparison to China and the U.S., the Soviet Union's position on Vietnam was more uncomfortable because it was influenced by two conflicting interests—a desire to reach detente with the U.S. and an interest to gain Vietnam's support in its struggle with China. In general, the Soviet policy toward Vietnam during the war had several dimensions.

First, Moscow did not want to sacrifice its strategy of detente in its relations with the U.S. Second, Moscow was ready to provide all the necessary military and economic aid needed for Hanoi to pursue its war. Third, Moscow preferred negotiating a

settlement to the war rather than being drawn further into it.³⁴⁸

In other words, the Soviet Union tried to have great influence in Vietnam in order to realize its foreign policy goals, viz., to reach an appropriate settlement to the war and to make the Hanoi a reliable Soviet ally in the world communist movement.

In short, during the war, Vietnam was a pawn in the global ideological and power struggle among the U.S., China, and the Soviet Union. While Chinese interests would only later become clear, both the Soviet Union and the U.S. clearly showed their interests in the Vietnam conflict for the first time in 1950. The U.S. always feared a rapprochement between the two communist powers. China, in turn, was afraid of a Soviet-American détente while the Soviet Union was concerned about any improvement of U.S.-China relations. The triangular relationship can be divided into three periods.

In the first period(1954~1963), China wielded enormous influence on Vietnamese domestic issues. Following this strategy, Beijing tried to convince the North Vietnam to accept a definitive division of Vietnam by advising it to consolidate the revolutionary achievements in the North. In the second period between 1964 and 1968, both big brothers were competing to assist Vietnam in the war against the U.S. Soviet sources claimed that Vietnamese sympathies toward China were stronger than those toward the

³⁴⁸-Douglas Pike, *Vietnam and the Soviet Union: Anatomy of an Alliance* (Boulder: West view Press, 1987), p. 61.

Soviet Union. The reason for this was that China remained an important supplier of economic and human resources for Vietnam. China was also closer to Vietnam than any other socialist country in geographical and ideological terms. The Soviet Union tried to use every channel to exploit disagreement between China and Vietnam for its own interests. Although both China and the Soviet Union were the supporters of Vietnam, neither of them was satisfied with their Vietnamese 'friends.'

In the third period from 1968 to 1975, Soviet Union became the most important supporter of Vietnam but tried to manipulate its relations with both Vietnam and China through aid. During this period, China while continuing to support Vietnam started looking for a rapprochement with the U.S. through "ping pong diplomacy" in April 1971. In other words, the development of the triangular relationship among Vietnam, China, and the Soviet Union during the Vietnam War was a classic example of Cold War politics. In this game, all of them tried to win over the other with different means and methods to further their own interests.

For Vietnam, the most important task was to gain national independence, freedom and the reunification of country. In order to do so, Vietnam tried to carry out an independent foreign policy on the one hand, but also to gain as much support as possible from both "fraternal countries" on the other. These two tasks were closely related with each other. The policy of Vietnam was shaped and determined very much by the balance

of powers and the bipolarity of international politics. Both China and the Soviet Union claimed to be showing international proletarianism through their support to Vietnam, but in fact they were trying to defend their own interests. The rapprochement between the U.S. and China and between the U.S. and the Soviet Union in 1972, and the Paris Agreement in 1973 were evidence of the continuation of their approach toward Vietnam. A lesson that Vietnam could draw is not taking side in the competition between big powers and the best way is to keep a balance between them while increase its own strength.

3. Vietnam relations with the U.S. and China

Like the Soviet Union and China in the past, today both China and the U.S. are Vietnam's partner. The difference is that if the first and Vietnam became comprehensive strategic partners in 2008, the second and Vietnam just established their comprehensive partnership in 2013. If the similarities between China and Vietnam find in their common political system of one party system, socialist market economy and Confucian background, the convergence shared by Vietnam and the U.S. is more or less the challenge made by the rise of China. If the U.S. and Vietnam dispute about the questions of Agent Orange, democracy and freedom, China and Vietnam dispute about their sovereignty in the South China Sea. Both China and the U.S. compete with

each other for their influences in Southeast Asia as whole in Vietnam especially. There are three main disagreements between Chinese policy and the U.S. one. In term of security China protests the U.S. “hub and spokes” bilateral model of security established during the Cold War and proposed a multilateral system. In term of economy the U.S. tries to establish the U.S. led Transpacific Partnership(TPP) including 12 economies³⁴⁹ cross the Pacific without China while China follows the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership(RCEP). In socio-cultural aspect Chinese Confucian institutes versus the U.S. soft power including education, movie and music, etc.

In response to a question raised by a Vietnamese scholar on whether Vietnam should go with China or with the U.S. in the context of growing competition between these two giants in today’s East Asia, David Sharer, U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam averred that if Vietnam goes with China, it will lose its sovereignty, and if it goes with the U.S., it will lose its regime.³⁵⁰ This in a nutshell shows again the difficulties Vietnam faces in dealing with two powers, this time the U.S. and China.

Vietnam-U.S. relations could be considered one of the most fascinating relationships in the diplomatic history. The U.S.

³⁴⁹- They are Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, the U.S., and Vietnam.

³⁵⁰- Meeting on March 17, 2013 in Hanoi organized by the Japan Foundation Center for Cultural Exchange with Vietnam.

interests in Vietnam could be traced back to the year 1787 when President Thomas Jefferson first showed his willingness in trading a kind of dry rice with Cochinchina.³⁵¹ Yet, until the recent normalization, the relationship between two countries has never been a “normal” one. From being in a position of supporting Vietnam against the common enemy, the Japanese fascists, during the Second World War, and of preventing the French colonial occupation, the U.S. changed to a new stance of not recognizing Vietnam’s independence and agreeing with French to stage a comeback to Indochina. Very soon after the First Indochina War began in 1946, and with the escalation of the Cold War in Europe, the U.S. openly supported the French in an unequal war with Viet Minh led by Ho Chi Minh and shared by its end more than 70 percentage of the war’s burden.³⁵² In 1954 at the Geneva Cease-Fire Declaration, being afraid of the victory of the Communist North Vietnam, Walter Bedell Smith, the representative of the U.S. delegation declared that his government “is not prepared to join in a Declaration by the Conference such as it submitted.”³⁵³ In order to realize its

³⁵¹-Robert Miller, *The U.S. and Vietnam 1787-1941* (Washington: National Defense University Press, 1990).

³⁵²-Marvin E. Gettleman, et al, *Vietnam and America-a documented history* (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1985), p. 50.

³⁵³-Further Documents Relating to the Discussion of Indochina at the Geneva Conference (Miscellaneous No. 20 (1954), Command Paper, 9239), London, Great Britain Parliamentary Sessional Papers, xxxi (1953-1954), p. 6.

containment policy, the U.S. backed Ngo Dinh Diem by creating the Republic of Vietnam on October 26, 1955 which was considered as “Vietnam’s Democratic One-Man Rule” with the hope that “this aid will be met by performance on the part of the Government of Vietnam in undertaking needed reforms.”³⁵⁴ In 1967, under the administration of President Lyndon Johnson, the U.S. involvement was increased to 500,000 soldiers. However, the war cost about 58,000 American lives, the U.S. had to end its involvement with “no peace no honor,” and left the country in deep “Vietnamese syndrome.”

Due to many factors including the bitter lost in the war, the arrogance of Vietnam, the China factor and especially the involvement of Vietnam Cambodia, Vietnam–U.S. relations did not improve before 1991. In April 1991, a “road map” for normalization with Vietnam was laid by the U.S. whereby Hanoi was expected to take suitable steps to end the Cambodian conflict and cooperate in finding U.S. soldiers missing in actions and prisoner of war(MIA/POW). In February 1992, the U.S. Congress declared that it was satisfied with Vietnamese efforts in Cambodia as well in the MIA/POW issues leading to the lifting of U.S. sanctions in February 1994. In July 1995, the relations were normalized. However, the catalysts for the improvement of bilateral relations were economic interests and

³⁵⁴- Dwight D. Eisenhower’s letter to Ngo Dinh Diem on October 23, 1954, in Marvin E. Gettleman, *Vietnam and America: A Documented History*, p. 117.

the reform(*doi moi*) policy that Vietnam launched in 1986 at the Sixth National Congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party. Anxious not to lose business opportunities to countries like Taiwan, Singapore, Japan, and Korea, many American companies such as Boeing, General Electric, Microsoft and major banks and investors began to exert pressure on the Congress and President to open up to Vietnam. Thanks to the efforts of both sides, the U.S.-Vietnam Bilateral Trade Agreement was signed in 2001. Since then, the U.S.-Vietnam trade had increased dramatically over the last 12 years, from only \$1.5 billion in 2001 to 2009, \$7 billion in 2006 and reached over \$22 billion in 2012, and is expected to exceed \$50 billion by 2020. In term of foreign direct investment, the U.S. ranked one of the top five investors, including investment made by American controlled enterprises in Singapore and Thailand. Intel, for example, invested \$1 billion in a software project near Ho Chi Minh City.³⁵⁵

While trade is growing rapidly, concern is that Vietnam mostly enjoyed surplus(\$13 billion in 2013). There are also other issues that make both sides unhappy such as intellectual property rights, market access, and anti-dumping of certain Vietnamese products. Nonetheless, with a market of 90 million people and an average economic growth of 7% per year during the last five years, Vietnam was considered one of the most potential partners for

³⁵⁵- Intel opens its biggest factory in Vietnam at *BBC Vietnamese*, October 29, 2010, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/vietnamese/vietnam/2010/10/101029_intel.shtml>.

the U.S.. In comparison, Vietnam faces trade deficits (more than \$16 billion in 2012).³⁵⁶ Given its heavy dependence on China, the latter could harm the Vietnamese economy by dumping unfairly priced products or indulge unfair trade practices.

Consequently, Vietnam looks to promote strong economic relations with the U.S. to gain greater access to the U.S. market and to reduce excessive dependence on China. Therefore, the U.S. could be considered as a counterbalance to Chinese expanding influence in the region. For the U.S., arguments favoring improvement of relations with Vietnam are multiple: besides economic interests, security is one in which Vietnam has had more than a couple of thousand years of experience of how to deal with China in an asymmetric politics.³⁵⁷ More than two million Vietnamese living in the U.S. and the legacy of the war also served as catalysts for Washington to upgrade its relations with Vietnam.

Despite of the fact that Vietnam–U.S. relations have never been as good as today, there are still some challenges left over from the Vietnam War that both sides have to find common language. The first one is the problem of Agent Orange that was used during the war to destroy the areas where Vietcong

³⁵⁶- Hien Nhi, "To bring the bilateral trade between Vietnam and China to U.S. \$60 billion in 2015," *Cong an*, April 24, 2014, <<http://www.congan.com.vn/?mod=detnews&catid=707&id=493796>>.

³⁵⁷- Brantly Womack, *China and Vietnam: The Politics of Asymmetry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

and units of North Vietnamese army were suspected to be located. According to various sources, between 1961 and 1971, the U.S. military sprayed about 11~12 million gallons of Agent Orange over nearly 10% of then South Vietnam, and between 21 to 48 million Vietnamese were directly exposed to it.³⁵⁸ Actually, Agent Orange did not receive serious attention in the beginning because the Vietnamese government focused on the normalization process. However, soon after that Vietnamese public opinion on this issue has grown and it was brought it to the attention of humanitarian organization as well as American government. As a result, in 2007, the Congress approved \$3 million for “environmental remediation and health projects” in the areas affected by serious environmental degradation like Danang airport.³⁵⁹

The religious freedom and human rights issues constitute the biggest challenge in U.S.-Vietnam bilateral relations even before two countries normalized their diplomatic relationship. In a statement in November 2011 in Hawaii, the Secretary of state Hillary Clinton stated, “we have made it clear to Vietnam that if we are to develop a strategic partnership, as both nations desire, Vietnam must do more to respect and protect its citizens’

³⁵⁸-Mark E. Manyin, “U.S.-Vietnam Relations in 2011: Current Issues and Implication for U.S. Policy,” *Congressional Research Service*, R40208, May 18, 2012, p. 22.

³⁵⁹-Frederick Z. Brown, “Vietnam and America: Parameters of the Possible,” *Current History* (April 2010), p. 166.

rights.”³⁶⁰ The so-called human rights issues in Vietnam relate to participation in public demonstrations against Chinese assertive policy in the South China Sea, to criticize the Vietnam government on the “sensitive” issues like corruption, economic policy, political pluralism, disputes over real estate, etc. In order to understand Vietnam, one should take into account such values of Vietnamese society like national proud of independent spirit, revolutionary struggle, strong authority structure, the primacy of the community over the individual. These values will not vanish overnight, and therefore, the issues of human rights and freedom of religion will remain one of the most important factors in the U.S.–Vietnam relations. Despite some differences, these two can cooperate with each other for their economic interests, security and prosperity of the region.

Like other neighboring countries of China, Vietnam during the last three decades has experienced increased pressures from the rise of China in all aspects—political, economic, cultural and military. But unlike the others, Vietnam and China share a “love-hate” relationship that is far more complex and comprehensive. At first glance, Vietnam and China seem to share many similarities. Politically, both are ruled by their respective Communist parties since their independence in 1945 for Vietnam and in 1949 for China. Economically, since the late seventies both have undertaken

³⁶⁰-Hillary Rodham Clinton, “America’s Pacific Century,” Remarks delivered at the East-West Center, Honolulu, November 10, 2011.

reforms by taking their economies from centrally planned to market capitalist ones. Culturally, both of them have a common background in Confucianism. However, their bilateral relations have always been dogged by tensions.

A thousand years under Chinese occupation from 179 B.C till 939 and a dozen wars subsequently have created a deep mutual mistrust between Vietnam and China. In 1979 they fought a brief but bloody border war. The mistrust has increased due to the dispute over sovereignty claims in the South China Sea. By occupying the Paracel Islands in 1974 from the Republic of Vietnam, which was then involved in a war with North Vietnam, China for the first time laid its eyes on the South China Sea. Following this, in 1988 China clashed with unified Vietnam by trying to snatch the Spratly Islands by using force. In 1995 China challenged ASEAN when it seized Mischief Reef in the Spratly chain from the Philippines. From then China publicly questioned the legitimacy of all foreign companies collaborating with Vietnam in joint oil exploration in the South China Sea, such as Exxon and Conoco Phillips. Furthermore, Beijing arrested hundreds of Vietnamese fishermen around islands under its occupation and harassed Vietnamese and Philippine ships carrying out the seismic explorations in the South China Sea. Concerns reached their peak in 2009 when China officially submitted to the United Nations a so-called nine-dashed line map which claimed Chinese sovereignty over 80% of the South China Sea. It is

Part 1

Part 2

Part 3

particularly worrisome for the littoral countries since Beijing's claimed are backed by its huge economic might, military might and political assertiveness.

From a regional perspective, China's claims have challenged sovereignty of four ASEAN members, namely, Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam. From an international perspective, China's claims can potentially hamper freedom of navigation and access to maritime commons and hence expectedly elicited strong protests from major powers including the U.S., Japan, India, and Russia. From a systemic perspective, China's claim challenged the U.S., the sole super power, and raised a question of possibility of accelerated arms races leading to war. Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger warned that U.S.-China tensions would escalate if there were no serious attempts to promote mutual understanding and cooperation and suggested that they should "seek together to define the spheres in which their peaceful competition is circumscribed ... If that is managed wisely, both military confrontation and domination can be avoided; if not, escalating tension is inevitable."³⁶¹

Moreover, in 2012 China decided to establish the prefecture of Sansha city which included under its jurisdiction the Paracel, Spratly and Zhongsha Islands and surrounding waters. Soon after this, China established a military command in Sansha city

³⁶¹- Henry Kissinger, "The Future of U.S.-Chinese Relations," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 91, No. 2 (March/April 2012), p. 6.

which is considered preparation for full-scale military action if necessary in the South China Sea. In October 2012 the Public Security Ministry of China even published the U-shape map in the new version of Chinese passports. Among China's armed services the People's Liberation Army-Navy(PLAN) was given the highest priority as it is expected to undertake three main tasks—defeating invasion from the sea, defending territorial sovereignty, and protecting maritime rights.³⁶² By the end of 2010 the PLAN owned 31 relatively new and modern attack submarines and by 2020~2024 this number is slated to rise to 75.³⁶³ In addition to the PLAN, China seeks to strengthen and consolidate its maritime surveillance fleet to more than 300 vessels manned by more than 10,000 personnel. China has plans to expand these forces to 350 vessels and 16 aircraft by 2015.³⁶⁴ In doing so China would have the capabilities, should it so wish, to develop a more aggressive and assertive approach to defending

³⁶²- Office of the Secretary of Defense, "Military and Security Developments involving the People's Republic of China 2011," A Report to Congress Pursuant to the National Defense Authorization Act to Fiscal Year 2000, Washington D.C. 2012.

³⁶³- Ronald O' Rourke, "China Naval Modernization: Implication for U.S. Navy Capabilities-Background and Issues for Congress," *CRS Report for Congress*. RL33153, July 31, 2012, p. 15.

³⁶⁴- Carlyle Thayer, "*China's Naval Modernization and U.S. Rebalancing: Implication for Stability in the South China Sea*," Presented to the Fourth International Conference on the South China Sea co-organized by the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam and the Vietnam Lawyers' Association, Ho Chi Minh City November 18~21, 2012.

its territorial claims in the South China Sea. There is no way Vietnam can match China's economic and military capabilities. Therefore, asymmetry is the most critical factor for Vietnam to take into account. As noted, if China were to realize its claims in the South China Sea, it would potentially curtail Vietnam's access to the Pacific Ocean and put it perpetually under the Chinese courtesy. Against this backdrop, the U.S. pivot strategy to Asia is perceived in Vietnam as an effective way to counterbalance a rising China.

4. Vietnam's perception on the U.S. pivot

The pivot strategy was officially announced on November 17, 2011 by President Barack Obama in his address to the Australian Parliament outlining U.S. commitment to and involvement in East Asia. Although President Bush had proclaimed that East Asia spread from Japan to the Bay of Bengal was his top priority, the American involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq and the economic problems that arose, he could not pay enough attention to this region. The U.S. pivot to Asia has been an ongoing process for a long time, but turning point took place during 2009~2010 and that is linked to China's actions toward the South China Sea. As mentioned earlier, immediately after China officially presented its "cow's tongue map" claiming more than 80 percent of the South China Sea to the UN Commission

in May 2009, the U.S. Senate passed a resolution “deploring China’s use of force in the South China Sea and supporting the continuation of operations by U.S. armed forces in support of freedom of navigation rights in international water and air space in the South China Sea.” Replying to this, Chinese officials declared its claims in the South China Sea being a “core interest” and having the same importance for China as Tibet, Xinjiang and Taiwan do. In general the U.S. pivot is welcomed by Vietnam, but it is not without issues.

First, in term of security, a major concern relates to the capacity of the U.S. pivot in realizing its strategy as its defence budget was heavily cuts. On March 1, 2013, President Obama had to sign a law for a budget cut worth \$85 billion, which would not only affect the U.S. economy but indeed the world economy. In response, the Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel confessed that this will have “serious impact” on the ability of the U.S. military to fulfill its missions. About 800,000 civil personnel in the Department of Defense will have to reduce their working hours and other cuts will take place accordingly.

Second, in term of politics, although the U.S. has not publicly announced its intent to contain or encircle China, but it may be expecting Hanoi to join hands in some of its actions aimed at Beijing. To be sure, among the ASEAN members, Vietnam has experienced the most serious tensions with China over the ownership of islands in the South China Sea, it however does

not guarantee that Vietnam will chose the U.S. side. Due to its very complex traditional, historical, cultural and economic ties, not to mention shared political ideology, Vietnam does not want to confront its “big brother.” Like other countries in the region, Vietnam does not want to be forced to make a choice between China and the U.S.

Third, in term of strategy, for Asian countries, the pivot has to deal with a long process rather than with a strategy. For Asian countries, pivot to Asia does not necessarily mean that Europe and transatlantic cooperation will no more important for the U.S. and for the world security.³⁶⁵ The pivot also does not mean that the Middle East is no more important for East Asia, given that more than 90% of Northeast Asia’s hydrocarbon imports come from that part of the world.³⁶⁶ So in order to persuade its allies and partners, the U.S. needs to have a comprehensive vision for the future of the region. So far the U.S. has not shown it has a clear picture of the region that will combine both China’s interest and the U.S. position.

Fourth, in term of economics, the U.S. does not seem to have the capacity to provide a new kind of economic arrangement that can compete with China or replace it. In this regard, the

³⁶⁵- Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Balancing the East, Upgrading the West: U.S. Grand Strategy in an Age of Upheaval,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 91, No. 1 (January/February, 2012), pp. 1~6.

³⁶⁶- Michael Green, “U.S. turn its gaze to the Pacific,” *The World Today Magazine*, February/March 2012, p. 31.

Trans-Pacific Partnership(TPP) seems to be the only weapon the U.S. has. Created in 2006 with four countries—New Zealand, Singapore, Brunei and Chile—the TPP today has become an ambitious trade and economic cooperation initiative involving 12 countries at present, including Vietnam. The U.S. likes to create a strong alternative to protect and advance its economic and strategic interests due the failure of the Doha Round making much headway and the global economic slowdown.³⁶⁷ The U.S. expects that the TPP will cover such issues like services, investment, competition that are absent in the Doha Round, wherein the U.S. is in an advantageous position. When compared to China, the U.S. seems lagging behind in entering into bilateral and regional trading arrangements. China has concluded myriad free trade agreements with many Asian countries and is actively implementing them through various frameworks such as ASEAN+3, ASEAN+6, China-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) and the China-Japan-Korea, Trilateral FTA. With a GDP of \$9.8 trillion, China plays a key and irreplaceable role for ASEAN members. The U.S. has to do a lot if it wishes to catch up with China. To that end, in November 2012, during the 21ASEAN Summit in Phnom Penh, the U.S. launched the U.S.-ASEAN Expanded Economic Engagement(E3) to augment

³⁶⁷- Sanchita Basu Das and Hnin Wint Nyunt Hman, "The Next Decade in ASEAN-USA Economic Relations," *ISEAS Perspective*, No. 13 (March 11 2013).

economic links. Except Singapore, which already has an FTA with the U.S., Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand are negotiating the U.S. for FTAs, while Vietnam and Malaysia are involved in the TPP. The China-ASEAN FTA has already operational since 2010, whereas the FTA between ASEAN and the U.S. is nowhere finalization.

5. Conclusion

Since the end of the Cold War, Vietnamese foreign policy has gone tremendous change from being a member of Communist block to following multilateralism. Like the past, today the whole Asia-Pacific, including Vietnam, seems to be again in the crossfire with growing competition between big powers, namely the U.S. and China.

First, for Vietnam history seems to be repeating as the U.S. and China, like Soviet Union and China during the Vietnam War, compete with each other for its influences. So the lesson that Vietnam has learned would be not to take sides in the big power competition but maintain a balance between them. One difference is that today Vietnam is a member of ASEAN and going along with ASEAN is a priority because ASEAN does not require Vietnam changing its political system(like the U.S.) and does not follow an assertive policy toward neighboring countries (like China).

Second, in order to dispel Chinese concerns about the pivot, the U.S. has to create a strategy of building confidence with China while strengthen its partnerships with allies and friends including Vietnam. For that the U.S. needs to acknowledge the reality of China's rising power and influence, lest Beijing could misread pivot as a measure to contain China. Asian countries including Vietnam do not want to be forced to choosing between these powers.

Third, the U.S. needs to categorically make it clear to its allies and partners that the pivot is not just about containing China, but for peace, progress and prosperity of the whole region. Asia-Pacific is enough for both China and the U.S. to play a constructive role for all.

Fourth, as far as China is concerned, it should follow a peaceful development policy, be transparent in its policies and restrain from any threat of use of force. In term of the disputes in the South China Sea, all states do expect that China as a rising power respect the DOC and work together with other to achieve a COC soon.

Finally, as big powers the U.S. and China should play a constructive role in keeping East Asia peaceful and stable and support ASEAN in constructing a security architecture that contributes to the economic development of the region.

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