

Vietnam - India Defense Cooperation Under the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership: Achievements, Challenges and Prospects

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to analyze the achievements, challenges and orientations for Vietnam-India defense and security cooperation since both sides elevated their relations to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in September 2016. The study is based on qualitative analysis methods, using data from secondary documents related to Vietnam-India relations. The results show that since 2016, Vietnam and India have made significant progress in defense and security cooperation through various activities such as high-level exchanges, policy dialogues, military equipment transfers and joint training. However, some constraints remain regarding more advanced forms of cooperation. While defense ties have grown remarkably, continued efforts are needed to tap the full potential. Regional tensions also persist with China's unilateral actions in the South China Sea. In that context, Vietnam and India need to further strengthen defense and security cooperation by expanding engagements in key areas and effectively implementing signed agreements. There is ample room for both sides to foster this key pillar of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and ensure peace in the Indo-Pacific region.

INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century context, Vietnam and India have emerged as major powers with important geopolitical and geo-economic positions in the Indo-Pacific region, with a firm dependence on the maritime domain in the East Sea and Indian Ocean for sustainable economic growth suitable to the prosperous development of the two countries in the “Asian century” (Aswani et al., 2022). However, the consequences of the major powers’ competitive strategies, especially the competitive relationship between China and the US, have plunged the regional situation into serious instability, directly affecting the peaceful security order and stability in the Indo-Pacific region in general and the East Sea in particular. Thereby, in order to enhance the bilateral relationship in the face of new challenges, Vietnam and India upgraded their relationship from Strategic Partnership to Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in September 2016. This event marked an important step forward in the comprehensive cooperation between the two countries, which have a long-standing traditional friendship for thousands of years (Marwal et al., 2021, p.10). According to the Joint Statement on the establishment of a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, the two sides agreed to bring the relationship to a new high level by enhancing extensive cooperation across all key areas. In which, defense and security cooperation is identified as the most important pillar and the driving force to strongly promote the development of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in depth and substance (Nga et al., 2021). After 07 years since officially upgrading the relationship to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, it is very necessary and important to assess the status quo and orientation for the development of Vietnam-India defense and security cooperation. This will help draw valuable lessons learned, while proposing specific solutions to unlock resources, tap huge potential in defense and security cooperation, and promote the increasingly extensive, reliable Vietnam-India relationship commensurate with the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent years, there have been some studies showing that Vietnam and India have made remarkable progress in defense, security, economic, and cultural cooperation... Typically, the study “Sino-Indian Competition in Southeast Asia” analyzed the impact of India’s and China’s competitive relations in Southeast Asian countries. In particular, the study emphasized Vietnam’s position and role in this relationship and clarified the defense and security cooperation mechanisms between Vietnam-India and Vietnam-China (Liem et al., 2021). The study “Realigning India’s Vietnam Policy Through Cooperative Sustainable Development: A Geostrategic Counterbalancing to China in Indo-Pacific” analyzed Vietnam’s geopolitical position and national power in India-China strategic competition in the Indo-Pacific region. Thereby, the study shows that India needs to adjust its economic cooperation policy with Vietnam in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. At the same time, the study explains how bilateral cooperation through sustainable trade, renewable energy production and green investment can create a

“counterbalance” to China’s expansion in this region (Aswani et al., 2022). The study “Vietnam-India Economic Ties: Challenges and Opportunities since 2007” analyzed Vietnam-India economic relations since the two countries established a Strategic Partnership in 2007 until 2016. Specifically, it focused on clarifying the economic advantages, needs, cooperation status of Vietnam-India economic relations during that period, and the prospects for bilateral economic cooperation in the future (Binh, 2016). However, there has not been any study focused on analyzing the development of Vietnam-India defense and security cooperation under the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership from 2016 until now.

METHODOLOGY

The article uses qualitative analysis methods, specifically international relations research methods, content analysis methods, historical and logical methods, and statistical methods through secondary data sources related to the topic to clarify the general objective of analyzing the status quo of Vietnam-India defense and security cooperation from 2016 up to now. Thereby, proposing specific solutions to promote increasingly in-depth, reliable, sustainable Vietnam-India defense and security cooperation commensurate with the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Accordingly, the article has 03 specific objectives: (1) Analyze the change in India’s foreign policy towards Southeast Asia; (2) Analyze the status quo of achievements and challenges in Vietnam-India defense and security cooperation under the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership from 2016 to present; (3) Propose solutions to enhance Vietnam-India defense and security cooperation in the future. To achieve the above objectives, the article focuses on answering 03 research questions as follows: (1) How has India’s foreign policy towards Southeast Asia changed since 1991 until now? (2) What achievements and challenges has Vietnam-India defense and security cooperation faced under the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership from 2016 to present? (3) What specific solutions should be proposed to further enhance Vietnam-India defense and security cooperation in the coming time? The research results are meaningful by providing a basis for assessing Vietnam-India defense and security relations after 07 years of establishing a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

DISCUSSION

The article provides an insightful analysis of the development of defense and security cooperation between Vietnam and India since the establishment of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2016. Several key points emerge: Firstly, there has been a strong upgrade in bilateral defense ties, evidenced through high-level visits, dialogues, joint vision statements, credit lines, and transfers of military equipment. This shows both sides’ commitment to strengthening the defense pillar of the partnership. As analyzed, common strategic interests, shared concerns over regional tensions, and convergent ideas of maritime security are driving forces.

Secondly, while defense relations have expanded impressively, continued efforts are needed to unlock the full potential. There is scope for more advanced forms of technology transfers, joint production, intelligence sharing, and coordinated naval operations. Constraints like India's bureaucratic system, capacity limitations, and geostrategic ambivalence have to be managed.

Thirdly, situating defense ties in the wider matrix of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership is crucial. The defense pillar needs to be supplemented by growing economic, cultural, and diplomatic links. Both sides can benefit from leveraging complementarities across sectors. There may also be opportunities to collaborate in the defense sector itself to make cooperation more sustainable.

Finally, regional dynamics remain in flux with increasing great power competition. Navigating these turbulent waters requires not just furthering bilateral defense ties but also shaping wider multilateral frameworks. The centrality of ASEAN-centered forums thus cannot be overlooked even as minilateral understandings between Hanoi and New Delhi intensify.

In conclusion, Vietnam-India defense ties have seen impressive growth since 2016 but sustaining this momentum will require concerted political willingness, stakeholder buy-in, and regional embedment. The comprehensive strategic partnership provides a useful umbrella if leveraged prudently by leaders on both sides.

RESULTS

Changes in India's Foreign Policy Towards Southeast Asia

In the late 1990s, China openly expanded its power down to South Asia and the Indian Ocean, which seriously affected India's traditional security and status in the region (Kiet et al., 2023). During that time, India carried out comprehensive reforms of the economy towards global integration, freedom and development of multi-regional and world trade relations in 1991. At the same time, Prime Minister Narasimha Rao announced the "Look East Policy" as part of the foreign policy and strategy in India's new era in that context. This policy has 04 main objectives: (1) Enhancing market connectivity, expanding economic and trade cooperation relations with countries in the Southeast Asian region; (2) Building economic corridors extending from South Asia to the Pacific, creating momentum for the development of India's remote and poor Northeast region in particular and the Indian economy in general; (3) Increasing influence on Southeast Asian countries, while promoting regional peaceful and stable order; (4) An indirect counterbalance to the policies and strategies that China is deploying in Southeast Asia, especially Myanmar and Vietnam (Marwal et al, 2021, p.35).

The year 2014 is seen as a milestone marking a strong change in India's foreign policy towards the Indo-Pacific region in general and China in particular. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India has shifted from the "Look East Policy" to the "Act East Policy" to change the approach more strongly and compete directly with China's strategies being deployed in Southeast Asia, especially to counter the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). On November 12, 2014, at the ASEAN-India Summit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared: "An era of industrialization, economic development

and trade is beginning in India. India's Look East policy will now be our Act East policy" (Muini et al., 2021, p.197). In addition to inheriting the goals of the "Look East Policy", the upgrade to "Act East Policy" under Prime Minister Narendra Modi also has 04 important goals: (1) Deepening comprehensive economic and trade cooperation between India and ASEAN; (2) Establishing strategic cooperative relations with countries that are important to India's foreign policy in Southeast Asia such as Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia; (3) Containing China's influence while directly countering China in this region; (4) Marking India's permanent presence in Southeast Asia, especially in currently unstable geopolitical regions like the East Sea.

Therefore, to quickly implement the "Act East Policy", Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited 8/10 ASEAN countries (except Cambodia and Brunei which were visited by the Deputy Prime Minister or Foreign Minister) and upgraded the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with Vietnam, Singapore, Malaysia. On the other hand, to continue affirming a greater role and promoting maritime security cooperation with ASEAN, for the first time in 2014, India officially mentioned the importance of maintaining maritime security and freedom, respecting the sovereignty of countries in the East Sea in a joint statement between former US President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Narendra Modi (Muini et al., 2021, p.191). When China moved the Haiyang 981 oil rig into Vietnam's sovereign waters in May 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi stated his support for Vietnam: "For peace and stability in the East Sea, all countries must comply with international principles and laws, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the East Sea" (Liem et al, 2021, p.104). Therefore, it can be seen that India has been making efforts to demonstrate the position and role of an emerging power in contrast to China's aggression. Although in 2019, India decided to withdraw from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), this event affected India's position and role towards Southeast Asia, but India was also ready to lower tariff barriers with ASEAN countries. Thus, in the volatile and complex geopolitical context of Southeast Asia today, the consensus on correlated interests between India and ASEAN has helped the two sides move closer together, especially for coastal countries like Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, the Philippines,... Therefore, the change in India's foreign policy towards Southeast Asia has been endorsed by ASEAN countries and the world regarding its important role in promoting multilateralism, creating a secure, peaceful and free maritime environment in Southeast Asia.

The Status Quo of Vietnam-India Defense and Security Cooperation from 2016 to Present

The diplomatic relationship between Vietnam and India has a long history and traditional friendship for thousands of years. In the 20th century, Vietnam and India always supported and helped each other in the struggles for national independence and liberation from colonialism. Under the nurturing of the feelings between the two leaders, President Ho Chi Minh and Prime

Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, Vietnam and India officially established diplomatic relations in 1972. Since then, the bilateral relationship has developed strongly in depth. In 1991, India officially issued the “Look East Policy”, which developed into the “Act East Policy” in 2014. In that, Vietnam is one of the most important partners in India’s new strategy in Southeast Asia. Therefore, to enhance the increasingly substantive bilateral relationship and trust each other in maintaining security, peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region in general and the East Sea in particular, Vietnam and India officially upgraded their Strategic Partnership to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in September 2016 during Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s official visit to Vietnam from September 2-3, 2016. At the same time, Prime Minister Narendra Modi affirmed that Vietnam is one of the important pillars in the “Act East Policy” and in the development of India’s relations with ASEAN. He wished to bring the bilateral cooperative relationship to a new high level, especially in defense and security cooperation (Tuan, 2016).

Since the establishment of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, Vietnam-India defense and security cooperation has achieved many remarkable achievements from 2016 up to now. Before upgrading the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, in May 2015, the Defense Ministers of the two countries signed the Joint Vision Statement on Vietnam-India Defense Cooperation for the period 2015-2020 and the Memorandum of Understanding between Vietnam and India on cooperation and coordination in combating transnational terrorism. The above statement was built on the basis of previous defense and security cooperation mechanisms between the two countries. The statement demonstrated the development trend in expanding comprehensive strategic relations between India and Vietnam. In which, defense and security cooperation between the two countries has been expanded in 03 forces: army, navy and air force. At the same time, the two sides strengthened cooperation in important areas such as military training, support for defense industry development. Additionally, the two sides signed the Cooperation Program on United Nations Peacekeeping Issues and the Technical Agreement on sharing non-military maritime information (Lan, 2018). During his visit in 2016 to upgrade diplomatic relations with Vietnam, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a Defense Line of Credit (LoC) package worth USD 500 million for Vietnam (Tuan, 2016). This aims to strengthen bilateral defense and security relations in line with the common interests of both countries in maintaining a secure, peaceful and prosperous environment in the region. This marked the beginning of the first major cooperative relationship under the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the two countries.

In 2017, Vietnam and India signed an Action Program for the 2017-2020 period. This emphasizes that the two sides need to maintain defense and security cooperation, continue to expand training programs, provide technical assistance, preferential credit packages, while enhancing cooperation in responding to traditional and non-traditional security challenges today for the benefit of both countries. Such cooperation also contributes to building a peaceful, stable, cooperative and developing environment in the region and the

world (Trong, 2017). On the sidelines of the Commemorative ASEAN-India Summit and the 69th Anniversary of India's Republic Day, Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc and Prime Minister Narendra Modi held talks to promote bilateral cooperation. Both sides urged the strengthening of defense and security cooperation and directed relevant ministries and agencies to make efforts to overcome obstacles in the bilateral cooperation process (Liem et al., 2021, p.130). From June 8-10, 2022, Indian Defense Minister Rajnath Singh visited Vietnam with the mission to hand over 12 high-speed protection ships to the Vietnamese navy under a \$100 million credit package. He also signed the Joint Vision Statement on India-Vietnam Defense Partnership towards 2030 and the Memorandum of Understanding on bilateral logistics support. This aims to expand the scope and scale of bilateral defense and security cooperation (Saha, 2022). This created an important breakthrough in India-Vietnam defense cooperation.

On June 17, 2023, during the official visit of Vietnamese Minister of Defense Phan Van Giang to India, the Indian Ministry of Defense handed over the missile frigate INS Kirpan to Vietnam with the statement: "This is evidence of India's commitment to supporting friendly partners in enhancing defense capabilities and strength based on the Security and Growth for All initiative in the region" (Thu, 2023). On July 24, 2023, the Indian Navy Admiral Hari Kumar visited and worked at the Vietnamese Ministry of Defense. On this occasion, the two sides exchanged views on navy training cooperation and affirmed that defense and security cooperation plays an important role as a bridge for the two countries to support and move closer to each other (Khanh et al., 2023). On November 30, 2023, two warships of the Indian Navy, INS Shivalik and INS Kamorta, visited Vietnam. This visit contributed to enhancing cultural exchange and tightening the traditional friendship and bilateral defense and security cooperation between the two militaries in general and navies in particular. It marked the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Vietnam and India (Tien, 2023). On December 11, 2023, the Vietnamese Ministry of Defense coordinated with the Indian Ministry of Defense to organize the 2023 Vietnam-India Bilateral Exercise on UN Peacekeeping (VINBAX 2023). This event contributed to strengthening the traditional friendship, solidarity and promoting increasingly substantive Vietnam-India defense and security cooperation (Hanh, 2023). Thus, it can be seen that Vietnam-India defense and security cooperation from 2016 up to now has achieved encouraging results. This helps both countries enhance national defense capabilities amidst new global challenges. Both sides agree to continue strengthening defense and security cooperation in the spirit of the Joint Vision Statement on Vietnam-India Defense Partnership towards 2030. The consensus between both sides to upgrade the relationship to a new high level and strengthen defense and security cooperation stems from the challenges of the global security situation, especially China. There are 03 issues that both sides are facing:

1. Vietnam and India share common interests in maintaining a peaceful, stable and secure environment in the Indo-Pacific region in general and the South

China Sea in particular. This stems from the fact that the South China Sea is very important for India's national security, with 92-95% of India's global maritime trade passing through the Malacca Strait (Liem et al., 2021, p.204). Additionally, 85% of India's imported crude oil is transported by sea routes across the South China Sea, and India has oil exploitation cooperation with countries in the South China Sea (Chakraborty, 2022). This makes the South China Sea one of the most important energy supply sources for India's energy security, especially oil exploitation cooperation with Vietnam. At the same time, the South China Sea plays a very important role for Vietnam, where issues of maritime sovereignty, islands and mineral resources are of decisive significance for the utmost interests and the survival of the Vietnamese nation (Dung, 2021).

2. Both Vietnam and India face challenges from China's rise in the Indo-Pacific region. India is currently directly competing with China's "String of Pearls" strategy deployed across this region. The "String of Pearls" is a strategy whereby China builds a network of commercial and military bases and ports in many countries, centered around establishing bases and facilities across the Indo-Pacific - a string stretching from Sittwe, Chittagong, Hambantota to Gwadar (Scott, 2017). One of the key goals of this strategy is to establish a network enveloping all of India's territory from mainland to ocean through the BRI and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). This has led India to shift its foreign policy towards China in order to protect national interests in the Indian Ocean region. As such, India has focused on enhancing defense and security cooperation with Vietnam, a middle power that has conflicts of interest in territorial sovereignty with China in the South China Sea. At the same time, Vietnam is one of the countries affected by China's "nine-dash line" claim in the South China Sea (Kiet et al., 2023). Due to the asymmetry of power between Vietnam and China, this has created a power imbalance where Vietnam faces tremendous pressure from China. To maintain the balance of power against China, Vietnam wants to establish partnerships with all countries around the world, especially India. The reason is that India and Vietnam share common interests in the South China Sea, with both wanting to maintain a peaceful and stable environment based on international law, while hoping to support each other in facing China's aggressive rise in the region.
3. Vietnam and India are emerging powers experiencing strong growth in the "Asian Century". India has a position and plays an important role as the most influential power in the Indo-Pacific, strongly affecting the global supply chain and world security. India currently has the 6th largest economy globally with a GDP of USD 2.66 trillion. Many experts predict India has potential to become a global superpower in the future (Kiet, 2023). On the other hand, in the 21st century, Vietnam has risen to become a middle power with an important position in the region and the world. In 1986, Vietnam's economy was only around USD 13 billion. However, by 2022 the economy had grown to USD 409 billion, ranking 5th in Southeast

Asia (Kiet et al., 2023). According to research and evaluation by scholar Hamada Kazuyuki, "Vietnam is the country with the highest economic growth rate in Asia. With a growth rate of 6.5-7%/year, Vietnam will enter the group of the 20 largest economies in the world by 2045" (Kazuyuki, 2021, p.67). This shows that Vietnam has made remarkable progress since implementing the renewal and extensive international integration policies in 1986. By now, Vietnam has reached the level of middle powers globally. Thus, Vietnam and India have much potential and advantage in bilateral cooperation, not only in defense and security but also in economic and trade relations. In 2022, the total export turnover between the two countries reached USD 15.05 billion (Thao, 2023). Therefore, it is expected that Vietnam-India cooperation will be further strengthened across all areas in the future, with defense-security and economic-trade cooperation as the top priorities.

Solutions to Strengthen Vietnam-India Defense and Security Cooperation in the Future

In order to respond to regional and global fluctuations, while enhancing Vietnam-India defense and security cooperation in the coming time, this paper proposes the following solutions: Firstly, Vietnam and India need to promote comprehensive and diverse military cooperation across all areas. Specifically: (1) Cooperation in aviation and navy: The two sides need to increase exchanges and joint training between aviation and naval forces to improve combined combat capabilities and coordination between the two countries' naval and coast guard forces in joint patrols, fighting transnational crime, and joint exercises. At the same time, the two sides need to actively promote substantive military cooperation such as India's transfer of 12 high-speed guard ships and the missile escort ship INS Kirpan to the Vietnamese navy, contributing to enhanced maritime cooperation and joint patrols in the South China Sea; (2) Army cooperation: Increase joint training and exercises between army units, especially special forces and UN peacekeeping units; (3) Diverse cooperation in defense industry and military science: The two sides should promote cooperation in transferring military technology, manufacturing/assembling modern weaponry such as missiles, drones, submarines, electronic weapons, etc. to enhance each other's military potential. At the same time, India needs to actively assist Vietnam in modernizing its military by transferring technologies like the Arjun Mk.1A tank engine, the Akash rocket artillery system, BrahMos supersonic missiles, etc. to help Vietnam shorten the time for military modernization. Vietnam and India need to enhance defense cooperation through military aid and assistance programs. Vietnam and India need to promptly sign agreements on procurement of high-value defense equipment such as missiles, submarines, aircraft carriers, etc. The two sides should also establish joint ventures in defense industry to jointly develop the defense sector, increasing self-reliance in supplying modern defense equipment to the military.

Secondly, Vietnam and India need to continue high-level defense and security dialogue mechanisms. Specifically, Vietnam and India need to

maintain mechanisms such as the Strategic Defense Dialogue at the Ministerial level, the Vice-Ministerial Level Defense Policy Dialogue, and other military dialogue mechanisms. This will enable the two sides to exchange extensively on strategy, common vision, and long-term security interests, providing overall guidance for bilateral ties in the medium and long term, while promptly tackling difficulties and consolidating mutual understanding and trust. At the same time, building mechanisms for intelligence information exchange and strategic situation analysis between intelligence agencies and military strategic research institutes to share assessments and forecasts of the regional situation, from which more close and effective coordination can be taken in tackling security challenges. Additionally, Vietnam and India need to make efforts to establish regional maritime security cooperation mechanisms. The South China Sea is a lifeline for both countries, so ensuring security and freedom of navigation there is extremely important. The two sides need to coordinate joint exercises, patrols to cope with maritime crime, terrorism, etc. to ensure security in this strategic sea.

Thirdly, Vietnam and India need to promote defense cooperation within the framework of regional and multilateral mechanisms such as ASEAN, the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus, etc. Through these mechanisms, Vietnam and India can propose and implement initiatives and programs for regional defense and security cooperation. This will contribute to promoting peace, stability and development in the Indo-Pacific region in general and the South China Sea in particular. Additionally, the two sides need to strengthen diplomatic cooperation to resolve territorial and maritime disputes through peaceful dialogue and negotiations in line with international law and the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. At the same time, Vietnam and India need to support each other at multilateral forums on territorial integrity and border issues. Overall, the Vietnam-India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership has many opportunities to further vigorous development in the future. The two sides need to proactively promote cooperation in all areas, with defense and security cooperation playing a key role. By maintaining high-level exchanges and expanding cooperation in key areas, Vietnam and India can substantially enhance ties, contributing to ensuring peace, stability and development in the Indo-Pacific region in general and the South China Sea in particular.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Since officially elevating relations to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in September 2016, Vietnam and India have achieved significant breakthroughs in defense and security cooperation. Specifically, the scale, mechanisms and areas of military cooperation between the two countries have been increasingly expanded and carried out comprehensively across navy, army and air force with various activities to deepen ties such as joint training and exercises, military equipment transfer, etc. This contributes to opening up prospects of a comprehensive and sustainable strategic military partnership between the two countries. However, geopolitical challenges remain as the situation in the South China Sea becomes more unstable due to China's

unilateral actions. Therefore, defense and security cooperation between the two countries needs to be enhanced to cope with new challenges. Based on the recognition of common interests and strategic interests, Vietnam and India need to continue consolidating comprehensive defense and security cooperation by maintaining high-level contacts, expanding cooperation on key areas, and effectively implementing signed agreements relating to defense and security cooperation. At the same time, Vietnam and India also need to increase their roles in multilateral mechanisms to help ensure peace and stability in the region. Overall, the Vietnam-India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership shows a positive development trend across areas, especially defense and security. Additionally, the two countries have ample room to further foster and deepen ties through strengthening defense and security cooperation to ensure peace and development in the Indo-Pacific region in general and the South China Sea in particular.

FURTHER STUDY

The article provides a comprehensive analysis of Vietnam-India defense cooperation since the elevation to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2016. While illuminating the achievements, challenges, and future orientations, it opens up avenues for further research across the following dimensions: Firstly, there is scope for deeper investigation into the specific factors enabling the strong growth in defense ties. Detailed case studies can examine the particular defense dialogues, joint statements, equipment transfers and training programs that have materialized this partnership. Process-tracing analyses can identify the negotiations, bargaining dynamics, and consensus-building efforts that made such deals possible. Qualitative approaches like elite interviews can uncover the motivations and restraints perceived by defense policymakers themselves.

Secondly, more comparative studies situating Vietnam-India relations in the wider web of strategic partnerships are warranted. This could involve juxtaposing the defense/military component across ties like Russia-India, India-ASEAN, China-Russia or even China-Pakistan. Such analyses can shed light on the unique aspects as well as common drivers shaping engagement. They can also clarify if Vietnam-India cooperation has indeed reached the levels seen in traditional strategic partnerships India has with great powers.

Thirdly, there is potential for evaluating scenarios and predicting trajectories for future defense cooperation. Simulation models and foresight methodologies can specify scenarios – covering optimistic, pessimistic and middle-range possibilities. Key variables could include regional tensions, great power postures, domestic politics in both nations, and economic growth scenarios. Such foresight analyses can help strategize policies today.

Fourthly, the role of defense cooperation in amplifying wider bilateral ties deserves attention. This entails analyzing spillovers across security, economic and technology spheres. Scholars could also examine if supplying defense equipment like Brahmos missiles opens doors for Indian entry into Vietnam's nascent military-industrial complexes. Questions like whether

defense ties stimulate economic partnerships better than the inverse are worth probing.

In conclusion, the article opens up interdisciplinary avenues spanning International Relations, Foreign Policy Analysis, Strategic Studies, Security Studies and even non-traditional topics like Defense Economics. Both qualitative and quantitative lenses can provide multi-dimensional insights, illuminating not just empirical factors but also deeper processes and future possibilities shaping relations.

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