

---

## **The Interests of the United States and Vietnam in the East Sea**



**Huynh Thanh Tien, Ph.D.**

Director of Resource Center for Community Development An Giang University, VNU-HCMCITY

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3389-9724>

---

**ABSTRACT:** Maritime security issue has recently been becoming a hot global issue. Therefore, it really needs a global solution as stated by Vietnam Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh on the virtual International Conference “Enhancing Maritime Security – A Case for International Cooperation” held on August 9<sup>th</sup> 2021. Particularly, territorial disputes in the East Sea ‘Biển Đông’ (internationally named as the South China Sea; in this paper, the author prefers using the East Sea), one of the most strategically geopolitical regions in the world, have become hotter and hotter recently. The East Sea is important not only to Vietnam’s socioeconomic development and national security but also to all countries in the Indo-Pacific region, including the United States. This paper aims to analyze the interests of both the U.S. and Vietnam in the East Sea towards the two countries’ strategies of national security and economic development and maintaining the peace and prosperity for this region and the world.

**KEYWORDS:** East Sea, geopolitical region, maritime security, national security, peace and prosperity

---

### **I. THE LOCATION OF THE EAST SEA**

The East Sea is a marginal sea of the Western Pacific Ocean. It is bounded in the north by the shores of South China, in the west by the Indochinese Peninsula, in the east by the islands of Taiwan and northeastern Philippines (mainly Luzon, Mindoro and Palawan), and in the south by Borneo, eastern Sumatra and the Bangka Belitung Islands, encompassing an area of around 3,500,000 km<sup>2</sup> (1,400,000 sq mi). It communicates with the East China Sea via the Taiwan Strait, the Philippine Sea via the Luzon Strait, the Sulu Sea via the straits around Palawan (e.g. the Mindoro and Balabac Strait), the Strait of Malacca via the Strait of Singapore, and the Java Sea via the Karimata and Bangka Strait. The Gulf of Thailand and the Gulf of Tonkin are also part of the East Sea. The shallow waters south of the Riau Islands are also known as the Natuna Sea.

The East Sea is a region of tremendous economic and geostrategic importance. One-third of the world's maritime shipping passes through it, carrying over US\$3 trillion in trade each year (China Power, 2021). Huge oil and natural gas reserves are believed to lie beneath this seabed, and it also contains lucrative fisheries, which are crucial for the food security of millions in Southeast Asia. The East Sea Islands, collectively comprising several archipelago clusters of mostly small uninhabited islands, islets (cays and shoals), reefs/atolls and seamounts numbering in the hundreds, are subject to competing claims of sovereignty by several countries. These claims are also reflected in the variety of names used for the islands and the sea.

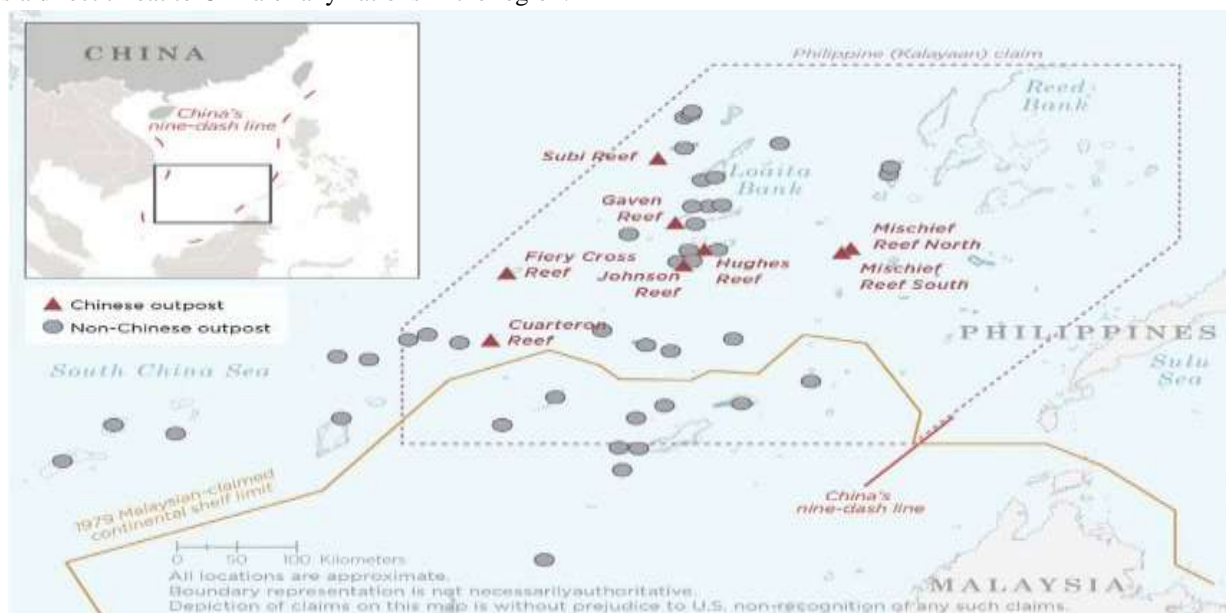
### **II. THE UNITED STATES’ INTERESTS AND ITS POLICIES TOWARDS THE EAST SEA**

The East Sea (Biển Đông) plays an important role in the U.S. military and economy. The United States’ allies and partners in the region use the East Sea as the main area of operations and the main route for commercial goods transportation. The freedom of navigation, the free access to the sea, and the freedom of over-flight become important to the security of all the close allies of the United States in this region. The 2017 National Security Strategy under President Donald Trump focuses on four vital national interests. The first pillar is to protect the homeland, the American people, and American way of life. The second pillar is to advance American Prosperity. The third pillar is to preserve peace through strength. The fourth pillar is to enhance American Influence (The U.S. President, 2017). It is clear from the four pillars that the U.S. President Donald Trump’s administration affirms its priority in maintaining the freedom of navigation in the East Sea. In general, the United States has major interests in the East Sea. It is stated in the 2017 National Security Strategy of the U.S. that China aspires to project global power, threatening to the American values worldwide. Maintaining a stable and secure Indo-Pacific and effective influence in the region directly supports the U.S. national interests. There are three reasons which the United States must project their presence in the East Sea region.

First, the United States wants to maintain its superpower status on the oceans. Maintaining maritime superiority is the backbone of the global hegemony of the United States. Its dominance in the sea facilitates the ability to counter any provocation and proliferation, protect the independence allies and partners, ensure the flow of commerce, and hinder the strength of potential rivals (Cronin, 2017). To ensure the sea power in the world, the United States can not lose control of the East Sea, considered as one of

## The Interests of the United States and Vietnam in the East Sea

the most important maritime regions in the world. From an economic perspective, the United States wants the Asia-Pacific region to maintain its continuing economic growth progress, benefiting the United States and its allies and partners' economic strength. Eight in ten busiest container ports of the world are situated in the Asia-Pacific region, and almost 30 % of the world's maritime trade transits through the East Sea annually, including approximately 1.2 trillion USD in shipborne trade bound for the U.S. Nearly two-thirds of the world's oil shipments transit through the Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean, and in 2014 more than 15 million barrels of oil passed through the Malacca Strait per day (The U.S. Department of Defense, Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy, 2015). From a military perspective, the United States can control the East Sea and its islands to facilitate all the warfighting functions of any operation executed in this region. Recently, China consolidated its control to its claimed territories though illegal. China even ceaselessly reconstructs and militarizes some entities in the disputed water. China's current expansion in the Spratly islands is focused on building the land-based capabilities of its three largest outposts – *Fiery Cross (Đá Chũ Thập)*, *Subi (Đá Xu Bi)*, and *Mischief Reefs (Đá Vành Khăn)* – after completion of its four smaller outposts in early 2016 (see Figure 1). A majority of the new Chinese outposts include new airfields, large port facilities, and water and fuel storage. Once all these constructive facilities are completed, China will be capable to maintain three regiments of fighters in the Spratly Islands. The airfields, naval ports, and resupply facilities on the Spratly Islands allow China to maintain a more flexible and persistent military activities in the area. (The U.S. Department of Defense, The 2020 Annual Report to the Congress, 2020). Moreover, the expansion of the military facilities in the East Sea enhances the Chinese intelligence, protection, fires, and mission command. The airfields in the Spratly islands allow China to have an advantage for execution of reconnaissance and surveillance in the region. Furthermore, the radar systems on these islands can expand the Chinese range of observation, which can hinder the operation of other nations' military activities. The new radar systems also can help China to establish the ADIZ (Air Defense Identification Zone), which denies the freedom of over-flight. The ADIZ generally expresses and consolidates the illegal claims of the East Sea sovereignty from China. For fire and protection, the control of the East Sea allows any nation to generate their own A2AD (Anti-Access Area Denial). This A2AD allows its nation-owner to control the entire area of the East Sea, one of the most important oceans in the world for economy and military, and also presents a direct threat to China or any nations in the region.



**Figure 1. China's Outposts in the Spratly Islands (The U.S. Department of Defense, The 2020 Annual Report to the Congress, 2020, p. 101)**

Second, through involved in the East Sea disputes, the United States of America (USA) can hinder the rise of China. Over years, China has a huge aspiration to be a superpower and will clearly become the only real threatening country to the U.S. global domination. At present and in the near future, there will be a competition and conflict between the USA and China because of the influential areas in diplomacy, information, military, and economy in this region and in the world. The rise of China really brings a more negative effect to the USA. As a result, hindering the rising and expanding influence of China is part of the USA's national strategy to maintain the United States' global domination. The East Sea is one of the key impacted regions that the U.S wants to control, because in recent years, the conflicts and disputes between China and the neighboring countries keep increasing because of the unsolved territory claims. This tension drives neutral nations, closer to China, towards the United States. Consequently, the USA has more allies and partners in the region, and they can share common interests with other nations in the region. Therefore, the USA's influential areas will be expanded, weakening China's influence on nationally powerful elements such as diplomacy, information, military, and economy to the region, hinder the rise of the elements and weaken the threats to the United States' global

## The Interests of the United States and Vietnam in the East Sea

domination. By supporting the countries in disputes on East Sea issues with China, the USA together with its allies and partners can encircle China, mitigate its influence in the region, gain competitively geopolitical competitive advantages with China to maintain, enhance, and affirm the United States' role in preserving the stability and security in the region (Le Khac Hieu, 2018).

Third, the United States expects to maintain its impacting superpower globally. The U.S. administration is facing China's rising influence in the Asia-Pacific region. During the Obama administration, the U.S. started adjusting its global strategy, greatly emphasizing on the Asia-Pacific region. Under the President Obama administration, the East Sea is one of the focused regions. In recent years, under China's rising influence, some of the U.S. partners have initiated to soften their relationship with China. For instance, China and the Philippines issued a joint statement on November 16, 2017 after the Chinese Premier Li Keqiang's official visit to the Philippines. It was stated that both nations identified positive achievements in their bilateral relations and they agreed to promote Philippines-China relations in a sustained and pragmatic manner (Gao, 2017). This is a significant step after the Philippines brought the East Sea Arbitration against China concerning the legality of China's "nine-dotted line" claim which includes Philippines' sovereignty. The Philippines's administration under President Duterte wants a more balanced relationship between Philippines, China, and the U.S., because of the increasing trade between Manila and Beijing. Nowadays, an increasing number of countries in the region have had a more economic dependency on China, making this region greatly impacted by China. It is possible that if the U.S. loses its capacity to impact the Asia-Pacific region, then it will also lose this biggest market in the world, and the ability to hinder China's power as a globally strategic competitor toward the U.S.. Therefore, to enhance the United States' interests in this vital region, the U.S. Government's policies are keystones to shape its operations in the region. Among these policies, the U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS) outlines the national interests and major national security concerns, and how the administration reacts to them. In the 2017 NSS of President Trump's administration, the Indo-Pacific region – the busiest and most industrial part of the world, was first mentioned. Additionally, China is also, for the first time, identified as a strategic global power competitor with the United States and is challenging its leadership role in the region.

Although the United States seeks to continue to cooperate with China, China is using economic inducements and penalties, influence operations, and implied military threats to persuade other states to heed its political and security agenda. China's infrastructure investments and trade strategies reinforce its geopolitical aspirations. Its efforts to build and militarize outposts in the South China Sea endanger the free flow of trade, threaten the sovereignty of other nations, and undermine regional stability. China has mounted a rapid military modernization campaign designed to limit U.S. access to the region and provide China a freer hand there. China presents its ambitions as mutually beneficial, but Chinese dominance risks diminishing the sovereignty of many states in the Indo-Pacific. States throughout the region are calling for sustained U.S. leadership in a collective response that upholds a regional order respectful of sovereignty and independence.

(The U.S. President Donald Trump, 2017)

To counter the threats hindering the U.S. interests in the region, the NSS clearly identifies the priority actions in the region as politics, economy, and military. In terms of politics, the U.S. continues to commit, expand, and deepen the allies and partnerships with the countries in the region sharing common interests with the U.S. It is noted in the document that the U.S. commits to protecting maritime freedom and the peaceful resolution of territorial and maritime disputes in accordance with international law, currently causing tensions in the East Sea (The U.S. President, 2017). In terms of economy, this document reaffirms to maintain free and open seaways, transparent infrastructure financing practices, unimpeded trade, and the peaceful resolution of disputes. The U.S. will seek free markets and protect them from forces sabotaging other nations' sovereignty. Also, a network of pro-U.S. states is indicated, and there is no doubt that the U.S. wants to oppose the extension of China in the region. In aspect of military and security, President Trump administration's policies toward the East Sea region are followed with those of President Obama. It continuously maintains a forward military presence capable of deterring and if necessary defeating any adversary. The U.S. will strengthen long-standing military relationships and encourage the development of a strong defense network with allies and partners under the U.S. leadership role. The 2017 NSS notes that the U.S. will re-energize its alliances with the Philippines and Thailand and strengthen partnerships with Singapore, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia and others to help them become cooperative maritime partners in order to hold back China's rise as a global sea power.

In conjunction with the 2017 NSS, the 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS) mentions that, among the competitors and threats to the U.S., China was mentioned first as the country using its predatory economy to threaten its neighboring nations while militarizing features in the South China Sea (The U.S. Department of Defense, Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America). China and Russia are mentioned in the 2018 NDS as the main threats of the U.S., followed by Iran, North Korea, and terrorism. This document has a significant change in priority of the U.S. national security, which remained stable for the last 16 years. This document recognized the challenge from China to the U.S.:

China is leveraging military modernization, influence operations, and predatory economics to coerce neighboring countries to reorder the Indo-Pacific region to their advantage. As China continues its economic and military ascendance, asserting power through an all-of-nation long-term strategy, it will continue to pursue a military modernization program that seeks Indo-Pacific regional hegemony in the near-term and displacement of the United

## The Interests of the United States and Vietnam in the East Sea

States to achieve global preeminence in the future. The most far-reaching objective of this defense strategy is to set the military relationship between our two countries on a path of transparency and non-aggression. (The U.S. Department of Defense, Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America).

Now the U.S. dominance in military power is challenged. "Today, every domain is contested-air, land, sea, space, and cyberspace." (The U.S. Department of Defense, Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America, p. 3). In the defense objectives toward the South China Sea region, it is documented in the 2018 NDS that the U.S. want (i) to sustain military advantages, (ii) to deter adversaries from aggression against U.S. interests, to maintain favorable regional balances of power in the Indo-Pacific, (iii) to defend allies and partners, and (iv) to ensure common domains remain open and free. To achieve these objectives, the U.S. needs to expand, strengthen, and evolve Indo-Pacific alliances and partnerships into a network capable of acting against any challenges is the priority of the U.S. This strategy focuses on three elements: foundation of mutual respect, responsibility, priorities, and accountability; regional consultative mechanism and collaborative planning; and interoperability. The three elements will strengthen the alliances and partners of the U.S. in the region, maintaining stability, and ensuring free access to common domains, in order to have an Indo-Pacific region prosperous and secured (The U.S. Department of Defense, Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America, p. 9).

### III. VIETNAM'S INTERESTS AND ITS POLICIES TOWARDS THE EAST SEA

Vietnam, officially the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, is a country in Southeast Asia. It is located at the eastern edge of the Indochinese Peninsula, and is divided into 58 provinces and 5 municipalities, covering 331,699 square kilometres, with a population of over 98 million inhabitants, making it the world's 15<sup>th</sup> most populous country. Vietnam shares borders with China to the north, Laos north, and Cambodia to the west; whilst maintaining maritime borders with Thailand through the Gulf of Thailand, and the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia through the East Sea. Its capital is Hanoi and its largest city is Ho Chi Minh City. This small shaped- S country lies entirely in tropical region, between latitudes 8°27' and 23°23'N, and longitudes 102°8' and 109°27'E. Vietnam shares the borders with the Gulf of Tonkin and the East Sea to the East; Laos and Cambodia to the West; China to the North and the Gulf of Thailand to the South. Vietnam has 4,639 kilometer-long boundary on land and a coastline of 3,260 kilometers long. Vietnam's territory on the sea occupies an area of about 1,000,000 square kilometers (Inside Vietnam Travel, 2021). Vietnam has a full legal foundation and historical evidence to back up its sovereignty claims over the Trường Sa (Spratly Islands) and Hoàng Sa (Paracel Islands) with more than 3,000 islands and islets scattered offshore as well (Nguyễn Minh Đức, 2011), and Vietnam calls for all countries to respect international law (Vietnam News, 2020). The widest area of Vietnam is about 600 kilometers, and the narrowest area is approximately 50 kilometers, so all the major cities of Vietnam are close and easy to approach from the coast line, and about 30 % of the Vietnamese live in coastal cities, and 40 percent of their livings depends on sea-related industry. Hence, the East Sea is critical for the development and the national security for Vietnam (Nguyễn Minh Đức, 2011).

In order to further promote the potential of the sea in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the 4<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Vietnam Central Committee of the Communist Party (10<sup>th</sup> Session) adopted Resolution No. 09-NQ/TW dated February 9, 2007 "On Vietnam's maritime strategy to 2020", which emphasized that "The 21<sup>st</sup> century is considered by the world as the century of the ocean". The Resolution identified the guiding views on the strategic direction of Vietnam's sea to 2020. The first target in this Resolution documented that Vietnam must become a strong country in the sea, enriching from the sea on the basis of promoting all potentials from the sea, comprehensively developing marine industries and professions with rich and modern structure, creating a fast, sustainable and highly effective development rate with a long-term vision (Vietnam Sea.Net, 2012). Totally, the ocean economy contributes 47-48 % to the Vietnam's GDP, mainly from crude oil, fishery, and logistics. Until 2013, the oil reserves of Vietnam were approximately 4.4 billion barrels, ranking the first position in the Southeast Asia, and the natural gas was about 0.6 trillion m<sup>3</sup>, ranking the third behind Indonesia and Malaysia. In the 2008-2015 period, Petrovietnam, the Vietnamese national petroleum and gas company, contributed 16-18 % of Vietnam's GDP, and 20 % of the national budget income. The crude oil exploited from the East Sea is one of the main sources bringing to Vietnam's foreign currency exchange. In 2014, the crude oil export contributed 12.1 % of the national budget (approximately five billion USD), while in 2015, because of the decline in oil prices, the crude oil export decreased to three billion USD, contributing 7.1 %. This foreign currency revenue source is important to a Vietnam's trade deficit economy, helping in importing, foreign trade, and national debt payment. As a country exploiting oil and natural gas resources from the sea, it is important to Vietnam's economy. Thus, maintaining the stability and security for the East Sea is vital to Vietnam for not only to exploit the petroleum and gas industry and develop marine economy but also to keep this region in a stable and secure development.

**Table 1. Petrovietnam's contribution to Vietnam's Economy**

YEAR	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Petrovietnam Gross Revenue (trillion VND)	235	325	363	390	366	311

## The Interests of the United States and Vietnam in the East Sea

Vietnam GDP (trillion VND)	1,980.8	2,537.5	2,978.2	3,139.6	3,937.0	4,192.9
The percentage of GDP contribution	24%	26.6%	25.9%	24.3%	9.3%	7.4%
Contribution to national budget (Trillion VND)	110.4	160.8	186.3	195.4	189.4	115.1
Percentage of contribution	27.9%	27.1%	24.4%	24.1%	23.3%	13.0%
Crude oil to national budget	14.4%	11.5%	18.3%	12.1%	12.1%	7.1%

(Le Viet Trung; Tran Quoc Viet; Pham Van Chat., 2016, p. 57)

**Table 2. Exports Contribution to Vietnam's Economy**

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Crude oil	9.37 %	10.36 %	9.70%	7.21%	4.79%	2.34%
Footwear	9.55 %	9.37%	8.58%	8.38%	6.81%	7.39%
Garments	20.90 %	18.91 %	17.04%	17.90 %	13.84%	13.93%
Aquaculture	9.36 %	8.75%	7.80%	6.68%	5.24%	4.06%
Others	50.82 %	52.61 %	57.48%	59.83 %	69.32%	72.28%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

(Le Viet Trung; Tran Quoc Viet; Pham Van Chat., 2016, p. 57)

For years, the aquaculture has been considered as the cornerstone of Vietnam's economy, averagely taking up over 8 % of its economy before 2012, greatly contributed to the industrialization and modernization of the rural areas of the country. In the Comprehensive Project of the Aquaculture Development towards 2020 and vision toward 2030 issued on 16 August 2013 by the Prime Minister, some strategic targets in details were defined. For instance, the total fishery production will reach to 7 million tons by the year 2020, and 9 million tons by the year 2030, in which aquaculture takes for 65% and the caught aquatic products account for 35%. The seafood export values 11 billion USD in 2020 with the growth rate about 7-8 % per year, and 20 billion USD in 2030 with a slower growth rate, 6-7 % per year.

**Table 3. Vietnam Seafood Export by Value: 2012-2017**

Year	Value (million US\$)	Growth rate
2012	6,076	-0.21 %
2013	6,681	9.95 %
2014	7,775	16.37 %
2015	6,558	-15.65 %
2016	7,048	7.47 %
2017	8,316	17.99 %

(Le Khac Hieu, 2018, p. 62)

Besides contributing to the GDP, the fishing industry provides around four million jobs throughout the country (Hong Thi Khanh Nguyen; Phan Thi Thu Hien; Tran Thi Nang Thu; Philippe Lebailly., 2017), and nearly 10% of Vietnam's population derives their main income from fisheries. Its population is growing by about 1% per year (nearly one million people), so the fishing industry helps Vietnam to maintain a stable society, and the fishermen themselves help the government to assert the fishing ground in the territory claims in the East Sea. Another economic interest from the East Sea likely bringing for Vietnam is that this marine route facilitates Vietnam to transfer with other countries. As Vietnam has been an official CPTPP member since February, 4<sup>th</sup> 2016 (the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership), this partnership enables its members to share a free and open markets. Five out of eleven CPTPP members (such as Japan, Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore, and Vietnam) use the East Sea as the main route to exchange with other nations. Therefore, maintaining a free and open East Sea helps Vietnam develop its maritime

## The Interests of the United States and Vietnam in the East Sea

economy and the maritime logistics and transportation.

For the aspect of security, the East Sea has an important role towards Vietnam's national security. The East Sea can be evaluated from different viewpoints, including national security, energy security, and diplomatic security. From the national security perspective, Vietnam has an entire border with the East Sea in the east, south, and southwest. Most major cities in Vietnam such as Ha Noi, Ho Chi Minh, Da Nang, Can Tho, etc. are about 150 kilometers away from the coast line and they are all connected to the coast by highways. The travel time from the coast line to these cities is less than two hours, making them easily vulnerable if Vietnam cannot control the coast line (Le Khac Hieu, 2018). He added that sustaining a balanced, open, and free the East Sea would help Vietnam reduce the risks from the East, seen as a historic invasion route. In case of a military conflict, the East Sea is a strategic route for Vietnam's allies and partners to support. If other nations in the region presently have a closer relationship with China, maintaining an open sea lane will be the only way to help Vietnam avoid being isolated by other countries. Moreover, Vietnam's military infrastructure in the East Sea will really be an advantage for Vietnam to operate their navy and their air force in this sea to deter any adversary in the region wanting to establish its hegemony in the region.

Furthermore, the East Sea is the linking route for Vietnam to connect with other countries cross the Pacific Ocean. The 2017 report of Vietnam Marine Department documented that 80 % of the merchandise, and 90 % of the imported and exported goods are transported by sea . According to statistics from the Ministry of Planning and Investment, the gross regional domestic product (GRDP) of coastal localities grew by an average 7.5 % each year during 2008-2017, much higher than the national rate. In 2017, these areas made up 60.5 % of the national GDP (Vietnam News Agency (VNA), 2019). The top export destinations of Vietnam are the United States, China, Japan, South Korea, and Germany while the biggest importers are China, South Korea, Japan, other Asian countries, and Thailand. Open sea lanes support Vietnam in avoiding economic dependency on their neighboring countries, and develop the trading transactions with other nations, especially when Vietnam joined the CPTPP, which excluded China, and wants to broaden its trading partners. Because of the importance of the East Sea to Vietnam, the 10<sup>th</sup> Party Central Committee issued the Resolution on Vietnam Marine Strategy to 2020 with the objective to promote Vietnam to become a prosperous country based on maritime economy. Later, General Secretary and President Nguyen Phu Trong at the opening session of the 8<sup>th</sup> meeting of the 12<sup>th</sup> Party Central Committee in October 2018 affirmed the importance of the sea and islands, saying that this is a very important issue related to the development of the country's marine economy associated with social development, protection of natural resources and environment, coping with climate change, and rising sea levels, and ensuring national defense, security, foreign affairs, and international cooperation on the sea. He adds that in the new context and new trends, Vietnam's maritime policy needs to change its approach to ensure successful implementation of many basic tasks at the same time: ensuring security, sovereignty and interests of Vietnam at sea, and developing a sustainable marine economy based on the responsibility of protecting the environment and marine resources. First of all, there must be a harmony and balance between the tasks of maintaining peace and stability in the region, ensuring security and sovereignty, exploration and development of the marine economy, and at the same time building a sense of protecting marine environment and resources, in compliance with the provisions of international law on the use, exploitation and management of the sea (Thuy Anh, 2019). The target of becoming a strong marine country was clearly stated in the resolution on the strategy for sustainable development of the marine economy by 2030 with vision until 2045.

Accordingly, sea-based industries are expected to contribute about 10 % to the national GDP, 28 coastal provinces and cities will make up 65-70 % of the nation's GDP. Sea-based economic activities will develop sustainably inline with international standards while exploitation of marine resources will be controlled within the resilience of the marine ecosystems. The resolution lays down three breakthrough areas and seven major guidelines to recognize the goal, looking to raise public awareness of sustainable development of marine economy, complete institutions and mechanisms, branch out science technology, train high-quality human resources, improve capacity in ensuring security-defense, and encourage the establishment of powerful sea-based corporations. The successful and breakthrough developments in the maritime sector in the following order of priority: tourism and maritime services, maritime economy, exploitation of oil and gas and other marine mineral resources, aquaculture and fishing, coastal industry, renewable energy and new marine economic sectors (Viet Tuan, 2018).

However, there have been still disputes so far in the East Sea between Vietnam and other nations in the region such as China, Taiwan, or Philippines related to territorial disputes and fishing grounds. Thus, the socio-economic development must be executed in parallel with protect the national security, based on international law of the sea. The disputes in the region must be resolved peacefully without coercion, threats, or the use of force. Besides to focus on the socio-economic development, the resolution emphasizes Target No. 5 "Ensuring national defense, security, foreign affairs and international cooperation". This target is further explained as follows:

- To build a regular and elite revolutionary armed forces in the direction of modernity, prioritizing the modernization of military forces and law enforcement forces at sea;
- Constantly to consolidate and strengthen the all-people national defense posture connected with the people's security posture in the sea area;
- To ensure the capacity to handle situations at sea well, maintain independence, sovereignty, sovereign rights, jurisdiction and national interests in the seas.

## The Interests of the United States and Vietnam in the East Sea

- To enhance the capacity to respond to traditional and non-traditional security threats, ensure national security, social order and safety, and fight and defeat all attempts to take advantage of maritime and island issues to counter them.
  - Persistently to build and maintain a peaceful, stable and legal order environment at sea, creating the basis for safe and effective exploitation and use of the sea.
  - To strengthen and expand foreign relations, international cooperation, actively participate in and contribute positively to the joint efforts of the international community in the conservation and sustainable use of the sea and oceans;
  - To take full advantage of international resources and support to improve marine management and exploitation capacity, with a focus on science, technology, knowledge and human resource training.
- (The Vietnam Communist Party Central Committee, 2018)

The Vietnamese Party and State have issued important policies on East Sea issues, to protect the country's independence, sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity, maintain a peaceful environment, and ensure security, social order, and safety for national construction and defence. Vietnam has a coastline of over 3,260 km, with the two archipelagos of Hoang Sa (Paracel) and Truong Sa (Spratly) and more than 3,000 large and small islands. The full implementation of Party and State policies on East Sea issues plays a significant role in making full use of the country's potential and in protecting regional peace and stability to contribute to national development. A Party resolution dated October 22, 2018 on the strategy for the sustainable development of Vietnam's marine economy by 2030 and vision to 2045 sets a target that sea-based industries are to contribute about 10% of GDP, while the economy of the 28 coastal cities and provinces are to make up 65-70 % of the country's GDP.

Vietnam has firmly protected its sovereignty in line with the Party and State's stance on handling the East Sea issues in a peaceful manner and following international law, including the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS 1982). It signed agreements delimitating maritime boundaries with Thailand in 1997 and China in 2000, and the 2003 Vietnam-Indonesia continental shelf boundary agreement. Vietnam is accelerating negotiations with related countries to delimitate the country's sea boundaries in overlapping areas in line with UNCLOS 1982, thus affirming and effectively implementing the country's sovereign rights and jurisdiction over the East Sea. To maintain peace and stability, ensure freedom of aviation and navigation in the region, and prevent unilateral actions that cause tension and complicate the situation, Vietnam and ASEAN countries signed the Declaration of the Conduct of the Parties in the East Sea (DOC) with China in 2002, and actively promote the full and effective implementation of its contents, thereby facilitating the settlement of disputes in the East Sea. Specifically, Vietnam consistently affirms sovereignty over the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa archipelagos, as indicated in the National Assembly's 1994 resolution ratifying the UNCLOS 1982 and other legal documents. The Party and State also pay heed to developing the marine economy, encouraging and creating the best conditions possible for people to improve their livelihood by utilizing sea resources, while protecting the lives, assets, and operations of fishermen in Vietnam's waters.

Vietnam actively expands maritime cooperation with countries in and outside of the region on the basis of mutual respect, mutual benefit, and compliance with international law. It has to date worked with countries such as Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, China, and the US to diversify cooperation in the fields of gas production, fisheries, search and rescue, scientific research, and marine environment protection. These activities not only help Vietnam strengthen capacity in marine exploitation and management and improve knowledge and experience in marine fields, but also help countries better understand its viewpoint on the East Sea, thereby further strengthening friendly relations and creating a favourable environment for national development (Vietnam News Agency, 2021).

## IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is apparently true that the United States and Vietnam have common interests in the East Sea in particular and in the Asia-Pacific region in general. Their first interest that can be how to hinder their alike adversary – China, more and more aggressively rising to threaten the peace and prosperity in the region and the globe. For the United States, China is threatening the United States' global powers of military and economy, but for Vietnam, China has a very clearly huge ambition, which is to strongly turn the East Sea to be its own sea, no longer an international maritime route, and fiercely violating Vietnam's territory and maritime sovereignty. The second interest of the two nations is maritime security and freedom, and peace and prosperity for the region. The third interest is national security and national socioeconomic development. For Vietnam, it is China's direct threat to Vietnam territorial disputes about China's illegal invasion of the Paracel Islands and the Spratly Islands that Vietnam has had sufficiently historical evidence about its sovereignty of the two islands. This threat from China has negative impacts towards Vietnam's socioeconomic development and national security defense as its strategy to become a strong maritime country in 2030. Meanwhile, the issue of China's threat towards the United States' national security and national socioeconomic development in the East is indirect, but the strong rise of China and its illegal operations and brutal behaviours in this region is really a direct threat and challenge towards the United States' position Number One in military and economic power in the world, and more importantly, China's aggressive rise is threatening the overall piece and prosperity of the world. Therefore, it is urgent that the two nations – The United States and Vietnam, need faster

## The Interests of the United States and Vietnam in the East Sea

specific steps to strengthen their comprehensive strategic partnership for maintaining the freedom of maritime security, the common peace and prosperity of the East Sea.

### REFERENCES

- 1) China Power. (2021). Unpacking the Complexity of China's Rise. Retrieved from <https://chinapower.csis.org/much-trade-transits-south-china-sea/>
- 2) Cronin, P. (2017). MARITIME POWER AND U.S. STRATEGIC INFLUENCE IN ASIA. Retrieved August 21, 2021, from <https://warontherocks.com/2017/04/maritime-power-and-u-s-strategic-influence-in-asia/>
- 3) Gao, C. (2017). Chinese Premier: China-Philippines Relations as Warm as Manila's Weather. *The Diplomat*. Retrieved from <https://thediplomat.com/2017/11/chinese-premier-china-philippines-relations-as-warm-as-manilas-weather>
- 4) Hong Thi Khanh Nguyen; Phan Thi Thu Hien; Tran Thi Nang Thu; Philippe Lebailly. (2017). Vietnam's Fisheries and Aquaculture Development's Policy: Are Exports Performance Targets Sustainable? *Oceanography & Fisheries*, 10. doi:10.19080/OFOAJ.2017.05.555667
- 5) Inside Vietnam Travel. (2021). Vietnam Location. Retrieved from <https://www.toursinvietnam.com/vietnam-travel-guide/Vietnam-Location>.
- 6) Le Khac Hieu. (2018). The United States and Vietnam Interests in the South China Sea and Potential Military Cooperation between the Two Countries. Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: the Faculty of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College.
- 7) Le Viet Trung; Tran Quoc Viet; Pham Van Chat. (2016). An Overview of Vietnam's Oil and Gas Industry. *PetroVietnam Journal*, 57.
- 8) Nguyễn Minh Đức. (2011). Value Chain Analysis. Ho Chi Minh City: Nong Lam University.
- 9) The U.S. Department of Defense. (2015). Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy. Washington D.C. Retrieved from [https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/NDAA%20A-P\\_Maritime\\_Security\\_Strategy-08142015-1300-FINALFORMAT.PDF](https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/NDAA%20A-P_Maritime_Security_Strategy-08142015-1300-FINALFORMAT.PDF)
- 10) The U.S. Department of Defense. (2020). The 2020 Annual Report to the Congress. Washington D.C. Retrieved from <https://media.defense.gov/2020/Sep/01/2002488689/-1/-1/2020-DOD-CHINA-MILITARY-POWER-REPORT-FINAL.PDF>
- 11) The U.S. Department of Defense. (n.d.). Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America. Washington D.C.: The U.S. Department of Defense. Retrieved from <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>
- 12) The U.S. Department of Defense. (n.d.). Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge. Washington D.C.: The U.S. Department of Defense. Retrieved from <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>
- 13) The U.S. President. (2017). The 2017 National Security Strategy of the United States of America. Retrieved from <https://ge.usembassy.gov/2017-national-security-strategy-united-states-america-president/>
- 14) The U.S. President Donald Trump. (2017). China in U.S. National Security Strategy Reports, 1987-2017. Retrieved August 2021, from USC University of Southern California: China In U.S. National Security Strategy Reports, 1987-2017
- 15) The Vietnam Communist Party Central Committee. (2018). The session of the 8th meeting of the 12th Party Central Committee on Vietnam's the Strategy of Sustainable Development on Marine Economy. Ha Noi: The Vietnam Communist Party Central Committee. Retrieved from <https://thuvienphapluat.vn/van-ban/Thuong-mai/Nghi-quyet-36-NQ-TW-2018-chien-luoc-phat-trien-ben-vung-kinh-te-bien-Viet-Nam-den-nam-2030-397978.aspx>
- 16) Thuy Anh. (2019). Vietnam maritime strategy: Be careful with under-war-threshold actions. *Vietnamnet*. Retrieved from <https://vietnamnet.vn/en/maritime-sovereignty/vn-maritime-strategy-be-careful-with-under-war-threshold-actions-575290.html>
- 17) Viet Tuan. (2018). Vietnam aims to become a maritime powerhouse by 2030. *International VNEXPRESS*.
- 18) Vietnam Marine Department. (2014). Solutions to Decrease Transportation Expense in Maritime Transportation.
- 19) Vietnam News. (2020). Việt Nam reaffirms sovereignty over Spratly and Paracels islands. Retrieved from Vietnam News: <https://vietnamnews.vn/politics-laws/769721/viet-nam-reaffirms-sovereignty-over-spratly-and-paracels-islands.html>
- 20) Vietnam News Agency (VNA). (2019). Vietnam strives to realise goal of becoming powerful marine nation. *Vietnamnet Global*. Retrieved from <https://vietnamnet.vn/en/maritime-sovereignty/vietnam-strives-to-realise-goal-of-becoming-powerful-marine-nation-559731.html#inner-article>
- 21) Vietnam News Agency. (2021). Vietnam's policies on East Sea issues. Retrieved from VietnamPlus: <https://en.vietnamplus.vn/vietnams-policies-on-east-sea-issues/190871>.
- 22) Vietnam Sea.Net. (2012). Văn Bản Pháp Lý (Legal Documents). Retrieved August 21, 2021, from Hoàng Sa-Trường Sa: Chân lý luôn thuộc về Việt Nam.