



## MARITIME STRATEGIC COOPERATION BETWEEN INDIA AND VIETNAM: PROMOTING REGIONAL SECURITY AND ECONOMIC GROWTH IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

LAM BA KHANH TOAN <sup>(1)</sup>, KEERTHIRAJ<sup>(2)</sup>, VO HOANG YEN<sup>(1)</sup>

<sup>(1)</sup> Law School, Can Tho University, Vietnam

<sup>(2)</sup> Alliance School of Liberal Arts, Alliance University, Bengaluru, India

Corresponding author: Lam Ba Khanh Toan

Email: [lbktoan@ctu.edu.vn](mailto:lbktoan@ctu.edu.vn)

### Abstract:

This paper explores the potential for maritime strategic cooperation between India and Vietnam in the context of evolving regional security dynamics in the Indo-Pacific region. The study employs a qualitative secondary research methodology, including a review of relevant literature, policy analysis, and expert opinions. The research identifies the strategic interests, challenges, and opportunities for cooperation between the two countries in the maritime domain. The study tests three hypotheses related to the potential benefits of cooperation in terms of regional security, economic development, and diplomatic influence. The research finds that India and Vietnam share converging strategic interests in the maritime domain, including the need to counterbalance China's assertiveness, secure sea lanes of communication, and develop their maritime economies. The study recommends policy measures to enhance maritime strategic cooperation between India and Vietnam, including joint exercises, intelligence sharing, infrastructure development, and diplomatic coordination.

**Keywords:**-Maritime strategic cooperation, India, Vietnam, regional security, economic growth, diplomatic relations.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Maritime strategic cooperation has become increasingly important in today's globalized world. India and Vietnam, two countries situated in the strategic Indo-Pacific region, have recognized the importance of such cooperation and have been actively engaging in efforts to strengthen their maritime partnership. This paper aims to examine the current state of maritime strategic cooperation between India and Vietnam, the challenges faced by the two countries in expanding their partnership, and the potential benefits of such cooperation for both nations. According to recent studies, India and Vietnam share a common interest in maintaining a stable and secure maritime environment in the Indo-Pacific region (Thuong and Oanh, 2021). This has led to the development of several joint initiatives, such as the implementation of a Joint Vision for Peace, Prosperity, and People between the two countries in 2018. This vision emphasizes the need for closer cooperation in areas such as defense and security, economic development, and people-to-people ties.

Despite these efforts, there are several challenges that hinder the growth of maritime strategic cooperation between India and Vietnam. One of the main challenges is the growing presence of China in the region, which has led to increased tensions and competition among neighboring countries (Christensen, 2006). Additionally, both countries face resource constraints and institutional limitations that can impede their ability to develop their maritime capabilities. However, there are potential benefits that can be gained from strengthening maritime strategic cooperation between India and Vietnam. These include enhanced regional stability, increased economic opportunities, and the promotion of a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific region.



Furthermore, closer cooperation between the two countries can help balance the growing influence of China in the region.

The maritime strategic cooperation between India and Vietnam is a crucial component of maintaining regional stability and promoting economic growth in the Indo-Pacific region. Despite the challenges faced by the two countries, there is great potential for further development of their maritime partnership, which can bring significant benefits to both nations.

### **1.1. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Abigail Grace in “Beyond Defining a ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific’” (Grace, 2018) argues that despite the continued misunderstandings surrounding the intentions and objectives of the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” policy pursued by the United States, Japan, Australia, and India, experts should focus on evaluating the tangible shifts in regional powers’ Indo-Pacific policies. She suggests that a common public document defining FOIP would constrain each state from shaping their own policy and diminish the inclusivity emphasized by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. However, she encourages government-to-government strategic consultations to institutionalize and regularize these contacts.

Kawashima in his work, “US-Japan-China Relations and East Asian Regional Cooperation: Continuity and Change under Trump” (Kawashima, 2017).argues that recent political events, such as the UK’s decision to leave the EU and the election of Donald Trump to the US presidency, suggest a shift from globalism to isolationism in world politics. The author reviews Japan-US-China relations and East Asian regional cooperation during the Obama administration and compares them with the prospects during the Trump administration in the new political climate.

The article, “Security of sea lines: Prospects for India-Japan cooperation. Strategic Analysis” (Khurana, 2007) discusses India’s dependence on sea transportation for crude oil and natural gas and highlights the importance of securing sea routes. This security concern is shared by Japan, which relies on maritime lifelines for its energy and resource imports. As the economies of both nations grow and become more integrated, their strategic interests are likely to converge.

Long and Yen’s “Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy: A Vietnamese Perspective.” (Long and Yen, 2021) provide a Vietnamese perspective on the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy. The authors explain that while FOIP is a US-led initiative, it requires the participation of other countries in the region, such as India, Japan, and Australia, as well as contributions from developing economies. The article examines the stands of ASEAN and Vietnam on the strategy and offers an overview of FOIP.

Satake’s “Japan’s Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy” (Satake, 2019). argues that Japan’s “Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy” (FOIPs) is primarily a regional order-building strategy focused on establishing a pluralistic, inclusive, and rules-based regional order, rather than a solely geopolitical or geoeconomic strategy. The author emphasizes the importance of ASEAN in FOIPs due to its economic and demographic potential as well as its geographical position. However, the intensifying Sino-U.S. strategic rivalry poses a significant challenge to FOIPs, and the author suggests that Japan and regional middle powers, including ASEAN, must work together to avoid a “new Cold War order.”

“The Rise of China and Japan’s ‘Vision’ for Free and Open Indo-Pacific” (Satake and Sahashi, 2020) argue that Japan’s vision for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) is not a containment strategy against China, but rather an effort to maintain an open and inclusive regional order that incorporates all regional countries. However, the authors note that Japan faces challenges in realizing this vision due to resource shortages, legal constraints, and a lack of regional consensus. The authors suggest that unless Japan can address these challenges, the FOIP may not be a



meaningful strategy to prevent the emergence of a Cold War and maintain an inclusive and rules-based order in the region.

### **1.2. RESEARCH GAP**

Despite the extensive literature on India-Vietnam strategic cooperation, there is a research gap in the area of maritime security. While some studies touch upon maritime security issues, there is a need for a more in-depth analysis of the maritime security challenges faced by India and Vietnam in the Indo-Pacific region. Additionally, there is a lack of research on the implications of China's increasing assertiveness in the South China Sea on India and Vietnam's maritime security cooperation. Therefore, there is a need for further research to explore the maritime security dimension of India-Vietnam strategic cooperation, and its implications for regional stability in the Indo-Pacific.

### **1.3. RESEARCH PROBLEM:**

The strategic partnership between India and Vietnam has gained significant attention in recent years, particularly in the areas of economic and defense cooperation. However, there is a research gap in the maritime security dimension of their strategic cooperation. Given the increasing security challenges in the Indo-Pacific region, there is a need to explore the maritime security dimension of India-Vietnam strategic cooperation and its implications for regional stability.

### **1.4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS:**

- (i) What are the key maritime security challenges faced by India and Vietnam in the Indo-Pacific region?
- (ii) How has India-Vietnam maritime security cooperation evolved over time, and what are the prospects for further development?
- (iii) What are the implications of India-Vietnam maritime security cooperation for regional stability in the Indo-Pacific?

### **1.5. HYPOTHESES:**

- (i) India and Vietnam face significant maritime security challenges, including territorial disputes and non-traditional security threats, such as piracy and maritime terrorism.
- (ii) India-Vietnam maritime security cooperation has deepened over time, and there is potential for further cooperation in areas such as maritime domain awareness, joint exercises, and intelligence sharing.
- (iii) Stronger India-Vietnam maritime security cooperation will contribute to greater regional stability by deterring security threats and promoting rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific.

### **1.6. OBJECTIVES**

- To identify the key maritime security challenges faced by India and Vietnam in the Indo-Pacific region through a comprehensive review of literature.
- To analyze the evolution of India-Vietnam maritime security cooperation and identify potential areas for further cooperation.
- To assess the implications of India-Vietnam maritime security cooperation for regional stability in the Indo-Pacific, taking into account the changing security dynamics in the region.

### **1.7. SCOPE & LIMITATIONS**

This research focuses on the maritime security dimension of India-Vietnam strategic cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. It aims to identify the key maritime security challenges faced by India and



Vietnam, examine the evolution of their maritime security cooperation, and assess the implications for regional stability. The study will draw on qualitative secondary sources, including academic journals, policy papers, government reports, and news articles.

One of the limitations of this study is the reliance on secondary sources. While the literature review will cover a wide range of sources, it may not capture all the relevant information on India-Vietnam maritime security cooperation. Additionally, the study will be limited to qualitative analysis, which may not provide a comprehensive understanding of the quantitative aspects of India-Vietnam maritime security cooperation. Finally, the scope of the study is limited to the developments in India-Vietnam maritime security cooperation during the period between 2010 and 2022,

### **1.8. METHODOLOGY**

The research will adopt a qualitative approach and rely primarily on secondary sources. A comprehensive literature review will be conducted to identify the key themes and trends in India-Vietnam maritime security cooperation. The literature review will cover academic journals, policy papers, government reports, and news articles published between 2010 and 2022. The search terms used will include "India-Vietnam strategic cooperation," "maritime security," "South China Sea dispute," "Indo-Pacific region," and other relevant keywords.

The data collected through the literature review will be analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. The analysis will involve the identification of key themes and trends in India-Vietnam maritime security cooperation, as well as the implications for regional stability. The findings of the analysis will be presented in a narrative format, with supporting evidence drawn from the literature review.

## **2. TERRITORIAL DISPUTES AND NON-TRADITIONAL SECURITY THREATS**

India and Vietnam, as littoral states in the Indo-Pacific region, face various maritime security challenges that have an impact on their respective national security and regional stability. One of the significant challenges that India and Vietnam face are territorial disputes, which are the primary source of tension in the region. For instance, Vietnam and China have ongoing disputes over the Paracel and Spratly Islands, while India and China are in conflict over the Himalayan border and the South China Sea. These disputes have the potential to escalate into military conflicts, which may harm the economic and political stability of the region.

Moreover, India and Vietnam also face non-traditional security challenges in the maritime domain, such as piracy and maritime terrorism. Piracy is prevalent in the waters surrounding Southeast Asia, with incidents reported off the coasts of Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines. These attacks have resulted in significant economic losses for the countries involved, and they have also increased concerns about the safety of seafarers and cargo in the region. Similarly, maritime terrorism poses a significant challenge to maritime security in the region, as it can disrupt the flow of trade and negatively impact the economies of the littoral states. For instance, in 2008, a group of terrorists attacked the Indian port of Mumbai, causing significant damage to the city's economy and reputation as a safe and secure business hub.

The above evidence supports Hypothesis 1 that India and Vietnam face significant maritime security challenges, including territorial disputes and non-traditional security threats, such as piracy and maritime terrorism. These challenges have the potential to harm the stability and economic prosperity of the region.



### 3. SHARED MARITIME SECURITY CHALLENGES

India and Vietnam have recognized the importance of maritime security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region to ensure stability and security. India has been playing a significant role in enhancing maritime security cooperation in the region, including through its "Act East" policy, which aims to strengthen India's ties with Southeast Asia and the wider Indo-Pacific region. As part of this policy, India has been actively engaged in maritime security cooperation with Vietnam, which has included the exchange of intelligence, joint exercises, and capacity-building programs.

In recent years, India and Vietnam have deepened their maritime strategic cooperation to address their shared maritime security challenges. For example, in 2018, India and Vietnam signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on cooperation in the field of defense, which included maritime security cooperation. The MoU provides a framework for enhancing cooperation between the two countries in areas such as maritime security, counterterrorism, and defense production. India and Vietnam have also been conducting joint naval exercises, such as the "Samudra Shakti" exercise, which was held in the Bay of Bengal in 2018. The exercise aimed to enhance interoperability and strengthen the coordination between the two navies in the areas of maritime security and counterterrorism.

Furthermore, India has been assisting Vietnam in building its maritime capabilities through various capacity-building programs, such as the provision of patrol vessels and training for the Vietnamese coast guard. In 2019, India donated a patrol vessel to Vietnam, which was the second such vessel provided by India to Vietnam. The vessel will be used by the Vietnamese coast guard to patrol its territorial waters and protect its maritime interests.

The above evidence supports Hypothesis 2 that India and Vietnam's maritime strategic cooperation has been strengthened to address their shared maritime security challenges. The increased cooperation between the two countries in the areas of maritime security has the potential to enhance regional stability and contribute to the overall security of the Indo-Pacific region.

### 4. STRENGTHENING THEIR DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

India and Vietnam have a long history of friendly relations dating back to the 1950s. However, their diplomatic relations were not as strong in the past due to political differences. In recent years, the two countries have been working towards strengthening their bilateral relations in various areas, including defense and security. The maritime cooperation between India and Vietnam has played a significant role in strengthening their diplomatic relations. The two countries have been cooperating in the areas of maritime security, intelligence exchange, and capacity-building programs. India has also been providing assistance to Vietnam in building its maritime capabilities.

The increased cooperation in the maritime sector has led to a deepening of diplomatic relations between the two countries. For example, in 2018, the President of Vietnam, Tran Dai Quang, visited India, during which the two countries signed several agreements, including one on enhancing cooperation in defense and security. India and Vietnam have also been participating in various regional and multilateral forums together, such as the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM+), which is a platform for defense and security dialogue between ASEAN and its partners. India and Vietnam have been working closely in the ADMM+ forum to address regional security challenges and promote regional stability.

The above evidence supports Hypothesis 3 that India's and Vietnam's maritime strategic cooperation has contributed to strengthening their diplomatic relations. The increased cooperation in the maritime sector has led to a deepening of their bilateral relations and has also helped in promoting regional stability in the Indo-Pacific region.



## 5. POLICY SUGGESTIONS

Based on the findings from the literature review and the analysis of the hypotheses, the following policy recommendations are suggested to enhance the maritime strategic cooperation between India and Vietnam:

*Strengthening of Bilateral Mechanisms:* The establishment of a joint working group or a high-level committee on maritime cooperation between India and Vietnam can help in regularizing and institutionalizing maritime cooperation efforts. This would provide a platform for both countries to discuss and address issues related to maritime security, intelligence exchange, and capacity-building programs.

*Enhancement of Information and Intelligence Sharing:* India and Vietnam should strengthen their information and intelligence-sharing mechanisms to combat transnational crimes, piracy, and other maritime security threats. This can be achieved by the establishment of a secure communication network and the exchange of information through joint maritime patrols and exercises.

*Promoting Joint Maritime Exercises:* India and Vietnam should promote joint maritime exercises and training programs to enhance their interoperability and operational capabilities. Joint exercises will also help in building trust and confidence between the two countries and further strengthen their maritime cooperation.

*Investment in Maritime Infrastructure:* India and Vietnam should invest in the development of maritime infrastructure, such as ports, naval bases, and shipbuilding yards. This would help in enhancing their maritime capabilities and promote economic growth in the region.

*Engaging with Other Regional and Global Powers:* India and Vietnam should engage with other regional and global powers, such as the United States, Japan, and Australia, to promote a rules-based order and ensure the security and stability of the Indo-Pacific region.

The maritime strategic cooperation between India and Vietnam has the potential to play a significant role in promoting regional stability and security. The suggested policy recommendations, if implemented, can further enhance the existing cooperation efforts and promote a peaceful and prosperous Indo-Pacific region.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the maritime strategic cooperation between India and Vietnam has the potential to play a significant role in promoting regional stability and security in the Indo-Pacific region. The literature review indicates that India and Vietnam share a history of maritime trade, cultural exchanges, and strategic interests in the region. Moreover, the analysis of the hypotheses indicates that there is a positive correlation between maritime strategic cooperation and regional security, economic growth, and diplomatic relations between the two countries. The first hypothesis suggests that there is a positive correlation between maritime strategic cooperation and regional security. The evidence suggests that India and Vietnam have been actively engaging in joint maritime patrols, information sharing, and capacity-building programs to combat transnational crimes, piracy, and other maritime security threats. Such efforts have contributed to enhancing the maritime security of the region and building trust and confidence between the two countries.

The second hypothesis suggests that maritime strategic cooperation can promote economic growth in the region. The literature review indicates that India and Vietnam have been actively engaging in maritime trade and investment, which has led to the growth of their respective maritime sectors. Moreover, the analysis of the evidence suggests that there is a positive correlation between maritime connectivity and economic growth. The third hypothesis suggests that maritime strategic




cooperation can contribute to enhancing diplomatic relations between the two countries. The literature review indicates that India and Vietnam have been sharing common strategic interests in the region and have been actively engaging in diplomatic and political dialogues. Moreover, the evidence suggests that the strengthening of the maritime cooperation efforts has contributed to enhancing the overall bilateral relationship between India and Vietnam.

Based on the analysis, it is recommended that India and Vietnam should strengthen their bilateral mechanisms, enhance information and intelligence sharing, promote joint maritime exercises, invest in maritime infrastructure, and engage with other regional and global powers to promote a rules-based order and ensure the security and stability of the Indo-Pacific region. Overall, the maritime strategic cooperation between India and Vietnam has the potential to promote regional peace, stability, and economic growth. The suggested policy recommendations, if implemented, can further enhance the existing cooperation efforts and contribute to the overall security and prosperity of the region.

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