

INDIA-VIETNAM RELATION: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

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ABSTRACT

India- Vietnam partnership is key to maintaining peace and stability not only in South East Asia but in the entire Indo-Pacific region. India plays a leading role in the Indian Ocean region, while Vietnam holds an important geopolitical position in the Pacific region. Vietnam is a core partner of India in ASEAN and a critical partner in our look and Act East Policy. India and Vietnam, have a convergence of views on various regional and international issues which is now increased up to the level of better understanding each other's perspective and interests in the Indo-Pacific. Vietnam is likely to play an ever more critical and comprehensive role in India's strategic calculus. This article deals with historical linkages between India and Vietnam which will help to understand power politics between India, china and Vietnam in South China Sea and Indo- Pacific region in broader context.

Keywords: *India, Vietnam, South China Sea, Indo-Pacific, historical, Act East Policy, DeinBeinPhu, Ho chi Minh, strategic.*

India-Vietnam relations have been exceptionally friendly and cordial since foundations were laid by founding fathers of two countries- President Ho Chi Minh and President Rajendra Prasad and Prime Minister Nehru. The traditionally close and cordial relations have their historical roots in the common struggle for liberation from foreign rule and the national struggle for independence. Socialist republic of Vietnam is the easternmost country of Indo China peninsula in South East Asia containing population of around 94.6 million. Strategically India is surrounded by China to the north, Laos to the north-east, Cambodia south west and Phillipines, Malaysia, Indonesia across South China Sea. Its government is Marxist-Leninist one party socialist government. On the other hand India is strategically located between East and West Asia which provide a strong location to establish close contact with West Asia, Europe, Africa from western coast and also good relation with East Asia and South East Asia from eastern coast. India is second most populous country after China in world not only quantitative but also qualitative. It is surrounded three sides by Indian Ocean. Relation of India-Vietnam is based on value, geography and history. Both countries share along land border with China and Chinese policy of dominance brought both countries closer because both faced the same problem one in the form of border and naval clashes and other in the form of Sino-Indian conflict of 1962.

India Vietnam relation is mostly based on ideological foundation of Pan-Asian nationalism which was strengthened during cold war period when super powers tried to influence currently independent colonized nations. Fear of Chinese hegemony brought both countries together because threat was same in different forms. At the time of 1940s both countries were at the forefront of Asia's struggle for freedom. India got independence on 15th august 1947 but was continuously trying to improve status of other nations by supporting their freedom struggles and this made two leaders Ho Chi Minh and JawaharLal Nehru to think about future of relationship between India and Vietnam in broader context. Nehru's visit to Hanoi on establishment of the separate North Vietnamese state in October 1954 brought both countries closer. Strategic location of India and Vietnam also helped a lot because as India has its strong strategic location in Indian Ocean, in the same way Vietnamese strong presence in South China Sea is really appreciable. As we all know that "who will rule over the sea will rule over the world". So both countries can help each other in maritime security.

India Vietnam relation can be framed in general from 1954 war of Dien Bien Phu when India supported Vietnam's independence and withdrawal of France from Vietnam's land. India was mediator and supported to sign treaty between France and Vietnam. France was defeated in the battle of Dien Bien Phu (20 July 1954) and Vietnam got divided in to two parts North and South Vietnam via 17th parallel line. India's relationship with North Vietnam was not that much smooth as with South Vietnam because North Vietnam supported China in India China border war of 1962. After some time when South Vietnam bowed towards America then it gave time to improve relation between India and North Vietnam. Political gap between Hanoi and Beijing filled gap between Hanoi and New Delhi. India was non- aligned whereas Vietnam was communist, instead of that both came together because both were chained with different colonies, one was under Britain and other was under France. This experience of colonization was bitter

enough to add sugar between relationship of India and Vietnam, which developed a strong bonding between Hanoi and New Delhi.

Vietnam's dispute with China harks back to 1974 when China forcibly excited the then South Vietnamese garrison from the pattle island in the western Paracels in the battle of Paracels. The Chinese also forced the Vietnamese out of Jhonson South Reef in the Spartleys in 1988 after a brief naval battle on march 14th1988. China used force to occupy the Jhonson Reef of Vietnam. Chinese invasion on Vietnam in1979 taught alesson to both the countries that dragon can fire any time and only through cooperation this problem can be tackled. China was a great threat to India's position in South Asia and it was threat to Vietnam's position and existence in South China Sea. Indira Gandhi thought that to minimiseChinese influence in South Asia we need a good ally of ours in South East Asia and best option was Vietnam because it was already facing chinese influence in every manner. India's diplomatic support towards Vietnam created a gap of relation between India China and America during 1970s and 80s. India's support for Vietnam against America's invasion created hostile relation between India and United States of America and in the same way India's interest and support for Vietnam over the Chinese invasion in1979 delayed good Sino-Indian relation.

India's relationship with Vietnam was also a good sign of healthy relation with South East Asia. It is well known that defence and strategic relation between two countries also need to occur in political context. India Vietnam relation got momentum after 1972 when these two countries cooperated in economic, strategic and political fields. The officials in 12th ASEAN- India summit examined ways to achieve common goals and address shared challenges in the region. This includes upholding the rules based order in the Indo-Pacific and respect for international law, freedom of navigation and overflight, increase connectivity, coordinate on efforts to address the challenges of countering terrorism and upholding maritime security in Indo-Pacific.

At the time of cold war period when United States and USSR were fighting for their hegemone on all over the world. India supported Vietnam to fight against USA's and Chinese invasion which shows that ice between relations of these two nations was started melting. There was a geo-strategic logic for support of New Delhi to Hanoi to counter growing influence of China in South East Asia. End of cold war in 1991 was another good period for India to see towards South East Asia in general anparticularly towards Vietnam. In 1972 official relation between India and Vietnam started and India gave status of most favoured nation to Vietnam in 1979. Vietnam is member of UNO, WTO, ASEAN, APEC and that's why improving relation of New Delhi to Hanoi can help India to improve its relation with other countries. After end of cold war it took almost a decade to improve relationship between India and Vietnam. After a long time both countries took significant steps to improve economic and political relation in East Asia.

In 1991 the LPG (Liberalisation, Privatisaton, Globalisation) policy by PV Narshimha Rao brought a broad change to improve India's economic relation with other nation. Announcement of India's Look East policy in 1992 was really a ' Bramhastra' signaling new economic and political establishment in South East Asia. India was made sectoral dialogue partner of ASEAN in 1995 and also became participant of East Asia Summit in year 2005 which improved relation between India and ASEAN in general and Vietnam in particular which led to India ASEAN free trade agreement in 2008. End of cold war and disintegration of USSR was not only a shock for Vietnam but it was also bad for India because USSR was ally of both India and Vietnam. At that time on one hand Vietnam tried to be comfortable with India and on the other hand tried to improve its relationship with China through solving border dispute but on the matter of South China Sea and maritime boundaries disputes became deeper.

In 2000 Indian government gave name of "most trusted friend and ally" to Vietnam which shows that relationship of trust was deepen. India's relationship with Vietnam got a broader dimension, from strategic and economic it was added to security dimension, transfer of scientific knowledge and technology, joint defence training exploration, establishment of bases and so on. India established strategic relationship with Vietnam in 2007 by signing strategic partnership agreement which was increased to comprehensive level in 2003. For a long time India was dependent on Russia, Israel, and other nations for its arms supply and Vietnam provided a base to India for regular exchange of intelligence, joint exercises, training of pilots and naval officers, repair of Vietnamese aircrafts, small and medium arms production. India got market in form of Vietnam and on the other hand Vietnam got a good ally which made both countries to cooperate and to strengthen their relation in each and every manner.

In 2000 India and Thailand sponsored Mecong Ganga Cooperation agreement for better connectivity between east and west in regional tourism, cultural and educational fields. India, China, Vietnam, Burma and other Indo Chinese states are members of this agreement. It was a great victory of India

because China showed its interest many times to join this cooperation but neither got formal request. This cooperation provides a better platform for India Vietnam and other Indo Chinese nations to improve their bilateral and multilateral relation. In spite of slow progress in relationship both India and Vietnam are continuing to develop their economic and security relation. India's relationship with Vietnam is also counter of Chinese presence in Indian Ocean by expanding the Indian naval reach in South East Asia within South China Sea. India is doubtful towards Chinese "String of Pearls" policy and Vietnam is also facing the same problem with Chinese presence in South China Sea. This reason brought both countries together to cooperate against strong Chinese influence.

One of the most important part between relationship of these two countries is that India was in search for a base to sell its weapon and Vietnam was also in search of low cost technology through a supported friend and this brought both countries closer. During 1990s India has some marginal interest in South China Sea which got increased now in order to improve its relationship with littoral states. Border management is also an important fact in relationship. Strategic presence of India between golden crescent and golden triangle stresses India to think over improving its maritime and border security against drug trafficking, human trafficking, illegal arms transfer, illegal fishing, transfer of illicit goods and fake currencies.

Cyber security and space security are also other fields of cooperation because cyber security cooperation will help both countries to tackle problem of cyber threat. Use of soft power, Buddhism, ideology, people to people contact, cultural and educational ties, and scientific knowledge transfer brought both countries together to perform in a better way. It would not be wrong to state at the outset that there has always been a strategic dimension that shaped India-Vietnam bilateral relations. However, in the past, more often than not, this driving strategic factor was external, Cold War politics for example. What is different in the present era of India-Vietnam relations is that now India and Vietnam share many elements of their strategic vision of the larger Asian region and are firmly in the driver's seat in guiding their bilateral strategic relationship. India-Vietnam relations have been old as well as deep rooted in history. The defence relations between the two countries are expanding well and are of the nature of capacity building and training and deepening mutual understanding.

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