



Prospects for Vietnam - India Cooperation in The Context Of "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" Strategy

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Abstract: Despite geographic distance, Vietnam and India are culturally close, economically complementary and are "natural allies" in terms of security. The traditional friendship built and cultivated by President Ho Chi Minh and Mahatma Gandhi has become a valuable asset that people of the two nations will remember and continue to promote. The "Indo-Pacific: Free and open" strategy once implemented will serve as a new opportunity for bilateral relations to grow in both depth and breath. This paper first examines the foundations of cooperation and then puts forward some recommendation for improving the effectiveness of cooperation between Vietnam and India, mainly in the fields of politics, economics, and security.

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1. Introduction

Vietnam and India are geographically isolated but culturally close, economically complementary, and "natural allies" in terms of security. The traditional friendship built and nurtured by the great leaders of the two nations, President Ho Chi Minh and Mahatma Gandhi, becomes a valuable asset forever remembered and promoted by the people of the two countries.

Today under the context of the "free and open Indo – Pacific" strategy, the two countries have new opportunities for widening and deepening their bilateral relationship.

The paper presents and analyzes the potentials of bilateral collaboration; proposing some recommendations to improve the outcomes of cooperation, mainly in the political, economic and security areas in the new context, with the following observations:

The strong and stable development of Vietnam and India relationship, which emphasizes the cultural identity of the two nations, the harmony among people and between people and nature, will meet fundamental and long-standing aspirations of the two peoples, in line with the global trend of peace, cooperation, and development.

2. Foundations for Vietnam-India Cooperation

As mentioned above, over the past time Vietnam-India relationship has developed rapidly and comprehensively, proving that the two countries have had a certain foundation.

2.1. Historical Foundation

Vietnam and India had a longstanding relationship with about 2000 years, and later suffered the oppression of Western colonialism. In such a similar situation, both countries' patriotic and revolutionary leaders, headed by Ho Chi Minh and M.Gandhi, J.Neru all shared the spirit of national salvation, commitment to the cause of national liberation in each country and laid the groundwork for the current friendship and cooperation between the two nations.

When Vietnam undertook two strategic missions of building socialism in the North and liberating the South to unify the nation, the Non-aligned movement led by India formed an international people's front supporting the just cause of Vietnam.

It is noteworthy that while carrying out international duty in Cambodia, Vietnam encountered many internal, as well as external, difficulties. India stood by Vietnam with material and moral support.

Later, when Vietnam embraced Reform (Doimoi) and integration, India, with its achievements and experiences gained in the country's development, particularly in the Green revolution, became the first foreign investors having business cooperation in Vietnam.

Looking back on history, it is apparent that India is a faithful friend as in former Prime Minister Pham Van Dong's words Vietnam's "clear without a cloud" (Board of Directors, 2018). This is an important historical foundation



for further cooperation between the two nations in the future.

2.2. Achievements in Current Cooperation as a Firm Foundation for Further Development in Bilateral Relations:

As mentioned above, India – country of M. Gandhi and J. Neru – was one of the first countries supporting Vietnam's Reform (Doimoi) launched and led by Vietnamese Communist Party – President Ho Chi Minh's Party. With mutual trust and effective cooperation, in July 2007, Vietnam and India established a Strategic Partnership, which was lifted into a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in September 2016. Such a political relationship has opened up mutually beneficial cooperation for the interests of the two countries and their peoples:

With respect to trade, currently, India is one of the 10 biggest trading partners of Vietnam, while according to India, Vietnam is India's fourth largest ASEAN trade partner with a bilateral trade turnover of 10 billion USD (TELEPHONE VOV, 2018b). The two sides have set a target of 15 billion USD in 2020 (TELEPHONE VOV, 2018a).

Regarding foreign direct investment, Indian companies are one of the first foreign investors seeking cooperation opportunities in Vietnam. At present, India has 168 projects with a total registered capital of 756 million USD, ranking 28 out of 126 countries and territories investing in Vietnam (Trung, 2018a).

Vietnam-India relations also expand into other areas. India provides Vietnam with many preferences in training and education, science and technology, information and media, energy, agriculture, and tourism, etc.

Cooperation in defense and security has been effective and has become a bright spot in recent bilateral relations between Vietnam and India. In terms of defense, cooperation has been undertaken between two sides' maritime, air, and ground forces as well as in all three aspects of training, defense industry, and port calls. The two sides have discussed and signed Technical Agreement on sharing non-military maritime information and Cooperation programme on UN peace-keeping issues, etc (Vietnam News Agency, 2018).

In short, the achievements in cooperation has clearly demonstrated the trust between the two countries and has become a solid basis for mutually beneficial cooperation in the future.

2.3. New international factors contributing to the cohesion and development of the bilateral relations:

While economic globalization, political democratization, and social information have increasingly developed in depth, the trend of economic protectionism along with populism in politics has also risen, which has created new challenges for the development of human beings. Also, traditional and non-traditional security areas

have intertwined. Hot spots in the region and in the world hold hidden and unstable factors.

Both Vietnam's and India's economies have a relatively high level of openness. Thus, every change in the region and the world situation will affect their development, which is an important external factor leading to the two countries' cohesion in common efforts to respond.

In addition, the rise of China - the two countries' common neighbor and China's territorial ambition inland (with India) and at sea (with Vietnam) have turned Vietnam and India into "natural allies" (Trung, 2018d).

In particular, US President Donald Trump put forward "Indo-Pacific strategy" to connect the two big oceans. While there exist different points of view on this strategy, from our viewpoint, the strategy would be a "positive source of energy" contributing to "reviving" the development of a large region. That is because it is an area where the great civilizations meet – India's long-standing civilization and the US' industrial civilization. In the context of 4.0 Revolution, it would create a fast-paced development in a populous country with young and abundant labor force like India and would have a strong diffusion to the surrounding countries which possess creativity and aspiration of "rich people, the strong nation" like Vietnam.

It can be said that the historical foundation and results of effective cooperation between Vietnam and India are decisive internal factors, while the new international context plays a significant role in enhancing a more stable and healthy bilateral relationship.

3. Recommendation for strengthening Vietnam-India cooperation in the new context:

3.1. Perception:

From our point of view, there are some issues with the perception that need clarification and consensus:

Firstly, in the new context of the "Indo-Pacific: Free and open" strategy, it will definitely generate the development and dynamics for a large region, and simultaneously, contribute to the growth of the world economy. This will be a new opportunity for Vietnam's development. Hence, Vietnam should actively prepare both hard and soft environment to make the best use of this opportunity. To that end, Vietnam needs to see deep and broad integration into this region as an external pressure to undertake internal reform. Domestically, it requires Vietnam to eliminate institutional constraints, particularly those that can lead to the formation of interest groups.

Secondly, it is also a region where there exist competition and mutual restraint between big powers, including the Belt and Road Initiative promoted by China and the Indo-Pacific: Free and open" strategy led by the US. Therefore, with its geopolitical position, Vietnam needs to be good at judging the development of trends in order to take advantage of both strategies and to avoid



being trapped in competition and mutual restraints between big countries, first and foremost, between the US and China. In the context of hidden factors and unpredictable result of growing competition, strengthening cooperation with India – a strategic partner and loyal friend – is of necessity and importance to Vietnam.

Thirdly, it is high time to promote Vietnam's tradition of "Unity-unity-great unity" summarized by President Ho Chi Minh internally and "Cooperation-cooperation-great cooperation" externally, particularly with India, who Vietnam can rely on due to the absence of risk in the process of strengthening cooperation (Trung, 2018b).

3.2. Recommendations:

Recently, the mass media has passed on to readers many messages and recommendations on cooperation between the two countries reflected in the India-Vietnam Joint Statement issued on the official visit of Vietnamese President Tran Dai Quang to India on 4 March 2018.

On the basis of perception mentioned above, we put forward some following recommendations:

First, in terms of politics, history has proved that the trust between the top leaders of the two countries is of great importance. Hence, senior leaders of the two countries need to establish a regular exchange mechanism, thereby building a close and reliable personal friendship like President Ho Chi Minh, former Prime Minister Pham Van Dong with the previous generation of Indian leaders. Meetings between high-ranking officials would generate driving forces, positive energy for the sustainable development of bilateral relations.

Second, in terms of socio-economics, in addition to previous and on-going projects of cooperation in various areas, it is time to set up projects with national images and the symbols of deep cooperation between the two countries in the new context, which people can see and feel the friendship between two nations. For instance, livelihood projects can be launched such as hospitals, schools, nursing house, vocational centers for the disadvantaged people, parks or incubators for young people, especially those in rural areas. This is the advantage of demonstrating the soft power of a rising India.

Third, regarding defense and security, this is the field of effective cooperation in the past, which needs to be further promoted. From our viewpoint, cooperation in this area between the two sides should be extended into human security and general security. In addition, the countries should cooperate to improve the maritime law enforcement capability, enhance the capability of observation for maritime outposts at sea, prevent information warfare, cyber warfare, especially against the invasion under information conditions. These are all areas where India has advantages.

Fourth, the cooperation between provinces, especially those with cultural proximity, or cultural

exchanges for a long time should be boosted. This is the basis for long-term cooperation between the two countries because the friendship and the national image perceived by each other's people have a great impact on the sustainability of the bilateral relationship (Trung, 2018c).

Fifth, with regard to human resource training for the cause of industrialization and modernization of each country, this is a field of cooperation that India has a certain strength. The issue is to find a cooperation model that could effectively bring practical benefits to two countries' people. For example, in the context of deepening Vietnam's international integration and the achievements of the 4.0 Revolution in the world, the model in the field of agricultural development in Vietnam can be adjusted to become: Vietnamese Farmer – Vietnamese State - Businessmen (Vietnamese + Indian) - Scientists (Vietnamese + Indian), thereby combining the experience of India with the practice in Vietnam in order to raise the value and competitiveness of Vietnamese agricultural products in the global value chain. Moreover, the two countries need to promote cooperation in the field of social science and humanities research so as to help publish joint studies in each other's scientific publications.

5. Conclusion

Exchanges between India and Vietnam have been carried out for over thousands of years, and have brought about the current comprehensive strategic partnership as well as practical benefits to the two countries' people.

In the new context of the "Indian-Pacific Ocean: Free and Open" Strategy, a new India which has developed dynamically and harmoniously, does not threaten anyone, respects international law will provide an attractive model to the world. India, in particular, considers Vietnam as an important pillar in its Act East Policy, which will be a new factor for Vietnam's development and a positive energy source for bilateral relations.

The stable, healthy and sustainable relationship between Vietnam and India, which also contains the cultural identity of the two nations will fulfill the basic and long-term aspiration of the two peoples as well as will be in line with the global trend of peace, cooperation, and development.

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