



## EVOLVING ROLE OF VIETNAM IN ASEAN

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### ABSTRACT:

Vietnam stands as a key country in the Southeast Asian region. Vietnam pursued *doi moi* (renovation) programme for revamping economy in 1986. Vietnam has broken the country's isolation for international integration. In 1986 it embraced market-oriented socialism, opening up the economy while keeping society firmly in control. On the economic front, Vietnam gradually encouraged private enterprise and allowed liberal investment laws for inflow of foreign direct investments. Vietnam structured its foreign policy to seek membership in regional and international organizations for global integration.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is politically, economically, socially and culturally a diverse group consisting of all the Southeast Asian Nations. ASEAN was founded, after a number of unsuccessful regional organizations in Southeast Asia, with an objective to make all the ten countries in the region as its members. The ASEAN was first set up with five member countries – Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand – in 1967. Later, Brunei joined the bloc in 1984 and Vietnam get admission into ASEAN in July 1995 as its seventh member. The entry of Vietnam, hastened the long-cherished dream of an ASEAN to comprise all ten Southeast Asian countries was realised in 1999. This paper discusses Vietnam's cooperation to ASEAN and its contribution to the growth and security of ASEAN in the region.

**KEYWORDS:** market-oriented socialism , politically, economically, socially.

### INTRODUCTION

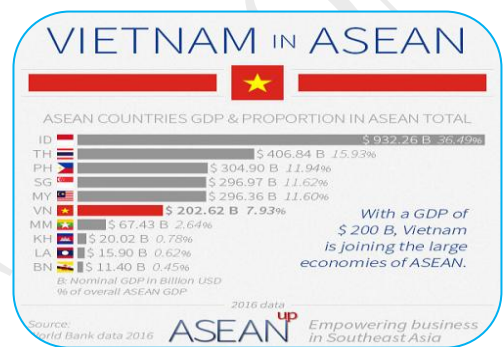
ASEAN was founded at a time when Vietnam remained divided into pro-American South Vietnam (RVN) and Communist North Vietnam, (Democratic Republic of Vietnam, (DRVN) supported by the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. The only ASEAN member with which DRVN maintained diplomatic relations was Indonesia because of their

significant historical relations as well as shared colonial past. Prof. Zagoria has pointed out: "Of all ten Southeast Asian countries only Indonesia and Vietnam had to fight for their independence. This has left a bond of sympathy between the two countries." <sup>1</sup> The DRVN was hostile towards the Southeast Asian grouping and its individual members. In December 1971, Vietnamese daily *Nhan Dan*, described ASEAN as "a product of U.S. aggressive and interventionist

policy," stated that true peace and neutralization in the region could be achieved only when all U.S. intervention ended and all U.S. and "satellite" forces were withdrawn from Vietnam.

### VIETNAM AFTER THE UNIFICATION

Vietnam was reunified in April 1975. By 1975, the Southeast Asian region was divided into two mutually intimidating groups. Vietnam was primarily against the



ASEAN's closeness with the US. Hanoi denounced ASEAN as "a Washington-backed scheme of intervention and aggression against communist governments in Southeast Asia" <sup>2</sup> In contrast, ASEAN remained conciliatory towards Vietnam and welcomed the unification of Vietnam. Even though Hanoi turned down ASEAN invitation to send an observer to the second ASEAN Summit at Kuala Lumpur in August 1977, the ASEAN Heads of Government "emphasized the desire of ASEAN countries to develop peaceful and mutually beneficial relations with all countries in the region, including Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam." They also "welcomed" the decision of the U.N. Security Council to admit Vietnam as a member of the organization.<sup>3</sup>

Vietnam chose to establish "discreet contacts" with several ASEAN governments as a part of its strategy of diversifying its overall diplomatic relations to develop profitable economic ties. Hanoi, thus, established diplomatic relations with the Philippines, Malaysia and Thailand. Deteriorating relations with China and Pol Pot's Kampuchea (Cambodia) pushed Vietnam to step up its efforts to ingratiate itself with ASEAN states. However, the clashes at Vietnam-Cambodia border in 1978 prevented Hanoi to have a meaningful relation with ASEAN. Though, ASEAN member countries were divided in their perception of threat from Vietnam, as an organization ASEAN was united to exert pressure along with major powers on Vietnam to withdraw from Cambodia.

### CLEARING THE CLOUDS

The relations between Vietnam and ASEAN which remained frosty in early 1980s, showed signs of steady improvement during the second half of the 1980s chiefly due to the pressure of worsening domestic economic scenario. Vietnam's altered foreign policy had created supportive environment for the Cambodian Peace Process to gain momentum. <sup>4</sup> *Doi moi*, though meant to resolve economic issues, Hanoi gradually embraced a holistic approach to reorient its relations with ASEAN.

### VIETNAM'S NEW THINKING ON GLOBAL INTEGRATION

The opening of economy had also brought in far reaching changes in Vietnam's foreign policy. Vietnamese leadership acknowledged the importance of economic liberalization associated with foreign policy changes in getting considerable support to the country. The change was clearly projected when Vietnam expressed its intension to join ASEAN.

Besides, Vietnam had its own economic and security priorities to integrate with ASEAN. Like the ASEAN Six, Vietnam too felt in the larger interests of the region, the need for creating what Malaysian strategic analyst, Noordin Sopiee, has called "a single Southeast Asian community" or "ASEAN family." He also noted that with ASEAN 10, Southeast Asia would be united for the first time in history and that itself was a symbol of progress.<sup>5</sup>

With the end of Cold War, Vietnam was required to cultivate new relationships with neighbours as well as major powers of the region. Further, the ascending impact of globalization and growing world of interdependability had begun to influence the region. While other states were seeking to enhance their trade relations across the globe, Vietnam could not remain unresponsive. Reflecting on shifting trends in Vietnam's foreign policy, Vietnamese scholar, Nguyen Vu Tung, observed : "The search for a new state identity - which is compatible to that of the ASEAN states - suggests that Vietnam would forge a closer co-operative relationship with the ASEAN states, and that membership in ASEAN would inform Vietnam's present and future foreign policy." <sup>6</sup>

### VIETNAM'S ECONOMIC PRECEDENCE

Since renovation, Vietnam gradually opened up its economy to the world. Over the time Vietnam had moved from a closed central planning economy to a more market economy and an attractive destination for foreign direct investments. This reform programme slowly resulted in the inflow of investments from near and far. Hanoi had placed a serious emphasis on turning Vietnam into an emerging economy expected to become one of the largest economies of the region. Vietnamese leadership also felt that its economic reform process must be defended with enhanced national security. Forging membership in ASEAN, Hanoi fervently hoped, would improve its stagnant economy and

promote security interests in the region. Carlyle A. Thayer, renowned Vietnamese affairs analyst, opined that Vietnam membership in ASEAN, while accelerating domestic reforms and benefitting Vietnam from increased trade and investment from ASEAN states, would secure Vietnam's integration with the regional and global economies as a long-term goal.<sup>7</sup>

ASEAN's strategic position, influence, prospering market, structured security mechanisms in the region further whetted Vietnam's appetite for integrating itself with ASEAN. Hanoi also expected that reasonable ASEAN-Vietnam relations would facilitate the development for better relations between Vietnam and others in the region and beyond. Improved relations between Vietnam and other ASEAN member states could help to bring normalized and improved relations between Vietnam and the United States.<sup>8</sup> This geopolitical thinking in Vietnam's foreign policy had led to broader and sustainable long-term relations with others. Nguyen Phuong Binh and Luan Thuy Duon, Vietnamese scholars, noted, "cultivating better relations with ASEAN, Vietnam did not have to sacrifice any of its relationships with external countries. Instead, becoming an ASEAN member helped the country to develop and improve its relations with other countries in its effort to become a friend of all nations in the world community."<sup>9</sup>

Member countries also viewed Vietnam-ASEAN relations would enhance peace, stability and prosperity of the region. In fact, some member countries were forthcoming to assist Vietnam in its efforts at renovation. It was evident with the high level visits of ASEAN leaders to Vietnam.<sup>10</sup>

### SECURITY INTERESTS

In having the membership of ASEAN, Vietnam saw an opportunity to advance its national security interests. Vietnam perceived its membership of ASEAN as critically important in the context of its tension-ridden relations with its historical rival, China. In an interview in Hanoi in early June 1992, then Deputy Foreign Minister Tran Quang Co said: "It's not good for a middle-sized country like Vietnam to live beside a big power without other friendly countries. It's good for us to have only one Southeast Asia."<sup>11</sup> Pointing out that Vietnam's joining ASEAN would serve as a major disincentive to China to pursue an aggressive policy towards Vietnam, a Vietnamese Foreign Ministry official said in 1992: "Sino-Vietnamese relations will be meshed within the much larger regional network of interlocking economic and political interests. It is an arrangement whereby anybody wanting to violate Vietnam's sovereignty would be violating the interest of other countries as well. This is the ideal strategic option for Vietnam. It is also the most practical."<sup>12</sup> While sharing the views of the Vietnamese, a Japanese scholar underlined the strategic significance of Vietnam's membership of ASEAN in the context of Sino-Vietnamese spat over the Spratly Islands: "Convinced that the China threat is real, but anxious to avoid hostilities, Vietnam is ... trying to draw closer to ASEAN, which shares Vietnam's concerns about ambitions in the Spratly Islands. China, it is argued, would hesitate to attack the islands of an ASEAN-related Vietnam, since such an attack would antagonize the other countries of ASEAN, which China looks on ... as potential allies in its struggle with big countries in the Asia-Pacific region."<sup>13</sup> The China threat was one of the major factors that pushed Vietnam to sign the TAC in July 1992. The ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (AMM) in Manila announced, in response to China's "provocative" actions, the "ASEAN Declaration on the South China Sea" on 22 July 1992, calling for peaceful settlement of the issue of Spratly Islands.<sup>14</sup> Vietnam's search for more friends against China propelled Hanoi to normalize its ties with Washington.<sup>15</sup>

Vietnam, perceived the urgency to break out of its international isolation and ginger its relations with the ASEAN states. Hanoi's completion of pullout of its troops from Cambodia in September 1989 as promised in January 1989, resolved one of the "great obstacles" to better relations. The subsequent signing of the agreements on a comprehensive political settlement of the Cambodia conflict in Paris on 23 October 1991<sup>16</sup> ended the 12-year old Cambodian imbroglio and also the major hitch in Vietnam's ties with the non-communist states of Southeast Asia.

On the other hand, ASEAN members were impressed by Vietnam's preeminent position in Indochina and its reputation of winning the long wars will strengthen the regional security architecture of the vulnerable Southeast Asia. The splendid victories of Vietnam against its adversaries – France,

China and the US – in the past have become one of the encouraging factors for ASEAN to invite Hanoi to join as a full member of the organization.

### MEMBER IN ASEAN

Vietnam's friendly disposition to ASEAN and its deep interest in ASEAN membership created a supportive environment for Vietnam's entry into ASEAN. On 22 July 1992, Vietnam was accorded 'observer' status in ASEAN. Vietnam formally applied for full membership of ASEAN on 17 October 1994. At the 28th AMM in Brunei on 28 July 1995, Vietnam joined ASEAN as the seventh member. Speaking on the occasion of Vietnam's admission into ASEAN, Vietnam's then Foreign Minister, Nguyen Man Cam remarked:

*We are witnessing the rapid development of regionalization and globalization all over the world. In this trend, the mutual dependence between nations is visible. In such circumstances, regional and global integration for development becomes an objective necessity. Viet Nam's joining ASEAN is an expression of this trend.*<sup>17</sup>

This transformation required Vietnam to pursue a "multi-directional foreign policy." Vietnam, hence, normalized relations with China 1992 and the US in 1995. Thayer rightly observed: "The improvement of Vietnam's bilateral relations with China and the United States should be seen as complementary actions."<sup>18</sup> Hanoi also developed its relations rapidly with other Western nations. Further, Vietnam's new open-door foreign policy, which helped to overcome the historical legacy of suspicion and mistrust with its ASEAN neighbours, also facilitated Vietnam's resolution such problem areas as displaced Vietnamese persons, demarcation of continental shelves, overlapping territorial claims involving Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand, and fishing disputes.<sup>19</sup> Thus, Vietnam's entry into ASEAN marked the culmination of its blossoming foreign relations.

On the prospects of integration with ASEAN, Prof. Pham Duc Thanh, Director of the Southeast Asia Institute, Vietnam, noted that "joining ASEAN had made Vietnam more relevant in the overall scheme of global geopolitics, because it added a new dimension to ASEAN's power and influence and, in turn, Vietnam could leverage its influence within ASEAN and on regional and even global politics through a now more 'weighty ASEAN'."<sup>20</sup>

### VIETNAM'S CONTRIBUTION TO ASEAN ACTIVITIES

Immediately after joining the ASEAN group, Vietnam had fully involved in different activities of the association. Thus, Vietnam expressed its desire to join ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA), which was formed in 1992 to eliminate tariff barriers among ASEAN member countries with an objective to integrate 'ASEAN economies into a single production base and regional market by 2010.' As part of Vietnam's continuing liberalization of trade and investment regime, Hanoi sent strong signals to the international trade community of its commitment to adopt new economic measures including intellectual property, services, industrial cooperation and investment. Simultaneously, Vietnam sustained the process of cultivating economic cooperation and bilateral relations with individual countries of Southeast Asia. Vietnam's immediate response to the adoption of those business norms and practices led ASEAN countries to strongly support its accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO).<sup>21</sup> Admission to WTO in 2007 offered substantial opportunities to liberalize its economic system and integration into international trading system, which became beneficial for Vietnam's economic development.

In the last two decades, after its accession to ASEAN, Vietnam developed trade and investment regimes through liberalization policies with the member countries of ASEAN. Vietnam's integration with the regional economy has been accelerated with its participation in AFTA. Vietnam's increasing participation in the ASEAN economic activities offer a plethora of opportunities in terms of greater market access for Hanoi's exports and greater inflows of foreign investment,<sup>22</sup> despite some concerns raised among Vietnamese policy makers and academic circles over the possible adverse impacts of the ongoing regional integration on the future development and industrialization in Vietnam.

## TRADE

In a very short span of time, Vietnam has laid a solid foundation upon which to build a two-way trade system in ASEAN. Trade has grown relatively between Vietnam and ASEAN. In 1996 the bilateral trade stood at US \$ 5.2 billion. The six ASEAN nations - Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand - erased 99 per cent of their import tariff duties by 2010. According to the Statistics of the Customs General Department, in 2014, ASEAN had become the second largest goods supplier to Vietnam, after China. ASEAN is also the 3<sup>rd</sup> biggest importer of Vietnam goods after the US and European Union. The total import and export turnover has reached US \$ 30.63 billion.<sup>23</sup>

Vietnamese enterprises earned US\$13.64 billion from exports to ASEAN market, which included key items like crude oil, steel, machines, equipment, spare parts, rice, garments and sea food. According to the General Statistics Office (GSO), in 2016 the export turnover to the ASEAN region was US \$ 17.45 billion and rose to US \$ 21.7 billion in 2017.<sup>24</sup> In trade, Vietnam imports many items for its production thanks to the slashed import tariffs, and then exports finished products to the world, including ASEAN markets. As a result, there is no real reason to be worried about the trade deficit between Vietnam and ASEAN.<sup>25</sup>

On the other side, Vietnamese enterprises imported commodities like, oil and gas, timber products, machines, equipment and spare parts, plastics, vegetable, raw material, telephones and components worth US\$16.99 billion from ASEAN. Vietnam's exports to other ASEAN markets have risen significantly. The change is because of the establishment of ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015, with a focus to create a tariff-free zone with 0 per cent tariffs on all traded goods and services. Vietnam capitalized on the slashed imported tariff conditions under regional commitments. Vietnam's agricultural products were greatly boosted its exports to ASEAN. In 2018, Vietnam's total export turnover of agro-forestry-aquatic products to the ASEAN region hit \$3.2 billion, up 34.4 per cent on-year, largely due to tariff cuts under the AEC.<sup>26</sup> The onset of AEC, enabled Vietnam to benefit by the free flow of goods, services, investments, and skilled labor, and the free movement of capital across the region. Vietnam made positive contributions for promoting peace and stability of the region as well as the integration and economic connectivity among the members.

## ASEAN INVESTMENTS IN VIETNAM

Vietnam entered into the Agreement on the Common Effective Preferential Tariff Scheme (CEPT) for the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) on 15 December 1995. The accession to the CEPT Agreement and Vietnam's participation in many other areas of ASEAN economic cooperation such as intellectual property, services, industrial cooperation and investment have created positive climate to foreign investors. In 2008, ASEAN member countries invested US \$ 17.5 billion, accounting for 40 per cent of the total direct investment during the period, compared to US \$ 9.5 billion in 2004 amounting 20 per cent of combined foreign investment.<sup>27</sup> Most of the ASEAN projects in Vietnam focused on property development, real estate, manufacturing, tourism, trading, food and drinks processing. The total foreign direct investment that Vietnam received from ASEAN members was almost US \$47 billion at the end of 2012. By 2014, ASEAN investments stood at US \$ 51.93 billion in 2,431 projects, which account for more than 21.4 per cent of Vietnam's combined foreign investment capital from all countries of the world. ASEAN investments spread throughout the country in 55 places of 63 provinces, but mostly concentrated in big cities with adequate infrastructure facilities. Regarding the investments, Ho Chi Minh City houses 1,036 ASEAN projects worth of US \$ 13.2 billion; Hanoi 391 projects with total registered capital of US\$8.53 billion and Ba Ria - Vung Tau province 66 projects value of US\$ 6.16 billion respectively.<sup>28</sup> Vietnam investments in ASEAN countries are mainly in hydropower projects, trading, transportation, health care, rubber farming, timber exploitation, and services.

Of all the ASEAN states, Singapore was the biggest investor with 1,312 projects with a total registered capital of US \$ 31 billion accounting for 59.87 per cent of the total investments, followed by Malaysia with US\$11.83 billion in 473 projects and Thailand with 365 projects worth of US\$6.63 billion in Vietnam. Other countries like Brunei, Indonesia, the Philippines, Laos and Cambodia also have investments in Vietnam.

By August 2014, Vietnamese invested US \$ 9.67 billion in 515 projects in nine ASEAN countries. <sup>29</sup> Laos had the lead in attracting Vietnamese investments in 348 projects worth US \$ 4.73 billion; Cambodia placed second with 161 projects worth US\$3.45 billion and Malaysia with 10 projects worth US\$754.68 million with third in the list. Vietnam has been a key beneficiary of ASEAN growth, which emerged as the third largest economy in Asia. Besides, it moved to the position of 5th largest FDI recipient in ASEAN in 2010 to the 2nd largest in 2017.

Vietnam's partnership with AFTA and admission to the WTO have created encouraging conditions to stimulate labour productivity as well as various business operations with the regional partners. Liberalization of markets and international economic integration has generated numerous opportunities for Vietnamese business houses to promote and expand markets remarkably. Vietnam has adopted a more realistic view of the ASEAN way and the benefits of multilateralism in a swank institutional setting. Vietnam is now more adept at pursuing multilateral and bilateral foreign policies in tandem. <sup>30</sup> Vietnam with its geographical location and to many important sea lanes, growing young population and miracle economic growth has been an attractive foreign investment destination for ASEAN members as well as others looking to expand their businesses in Asia.

### VIETNAM'S INVOLVEMENT IN ASEAN'S MECHANISMS

Being an active member getting support from ASEAN, Vietnam sincerely adhered to the cooperative principles of the regional organization. Membership of ASEAN enabled Vietnam to join the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in 1998. Its clout with member states was evident in the admission of Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia into ASEAN. After the admission of Laos and Myanmar in 1997, the only country left out was Cambodia. After the elections in July 1999 a coalition government was formed in Cambodia. Regarding the admission of Cambodia into ASEAN, there were differences among the members. While, Thailand, Singapore and the Philippines wanted to further delay its membership, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Laos and Myanmar favoured its immediate admission. As a host of the ASEAN Summit in Hanoi in December 1998, Vietnam lobbied successfully and ensured the Cambodian entry. <sup>31</sup> Cambodia became a member in April 1999 in Hanoi. Thus, the cherished ambition of ASEAN leaders of admitting all the Ten Southeast Asian nations into ASEAN turned a reality before the dawn of a new millennium.

In all the activities of the ASEAN, Vietnam proactively engaged itself for closer regional reintegration through periodical discussions and state-to state cooperation mechanisms. Within three years of its admission, Vietnam successfully hosted the 6<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Summit in Hanoi in December 1998. The significant outcome the Summit was the adoption of Hanoi Declaration and Hanoi Plan of Action. The Hanoi Declaration recalled the Vision 2020 of ASEAN as "a concert of Southeast Asian nations, outward-looking, living in peace, stability and prosperity, bonded together in partnership in dynamic development and in a community of caring societies", and emphasized the theme of "Unity and Cooperation for an ASEAN of Peace, Stability and Equitable Development." An action plan was also drawn to realize the vision of the ASEAN, known as Hanoi Plan of Action. It has a six-year timeframe and reviewed at ASEAN Summit Meetings in every three years. <sup>32</sup> It was also decided at the summit to take necessary measures to get out from the negative impact of 1998 financial crisis in the region.

Increasingly, Vietnam gained organizational experience at international level in hosting large summits like APEC in 2006 and ASEAN Summit in 2010. Being a member of ASEAN, Vietnam had the chance to widely integrate with the Asia-Pacific region. The East Asia Summit (EAS) and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) set stages to discuss political, economic, strategic and security issues at multilateral level. The ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM+) enables ASEAN members to interact with major powers on transnational defence and security cooperation in the region. <sup>33</sup> In the process, ASEAN assumed the status of an honest broker and mediator in dealing with complex security issues.

Further, Vietnam held the positions of president of the ASEAN Standing Committee (ASC) and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF); the Executive Committee of the commission for the Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ). Vietnam has been gaining experience through

partnerships in the World Trade Organization (WTO) and Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) about the global trade norms. Vietnam has been getting stakes out of its membership in ASEAN. The Secretary-General of ASEAN, Le Luong Minh, (former Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, Vietnam), who was elected for 2013-17 period, boasted justifiably:

*Viet Nam's admission to ASEAN was a historic landmark in the Association's evolution and maturity...Viet Nam has proven to be an "active, proactive and responsible member of ASEAN", making important contributions to the vitality, unity, cohesion and integration of our Association and its efforts to maintain peace, security and stability and to promote cooperation and development in the region.*<sup>34</sup>

The country has contributed to important documents such as the ASEAN Vision 2020 and implementation plans, the Declaration of ASEAN Concord II, the ASEAN Charter, the 2009-2015 Roadmap for an ASEAN Community, implementation plans for each community pillar, the Action Plan for the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) and Narrowing the Development Gap (NDG), the Master Plan, the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity and more.<sup>35</sup>

### STAKEHOLDER OF ASEAN EFFORTS

Vietnam soon after becoming the member, it committed to the interests of ASEAN's sustainable growth, multilateral role and common security environment of Southeast Asia. The economically vibrant and strategically important ASEAN region is becoming focal point for major powers like China, the US, Japan, Russia and India. The swift geopolitical changes, China's aggressive postures, reclamation work in the South China Sea and assertion of sovereign rights have been drawing the attention of the global powers to this region. ASEAN as a whole, while continuing parleys with China, has been drawing other global players into the region so as to maintain strategic equilibrium in the region. In the security architecture of the region, China's preeminent position can't be ignored by the ASEAN states. Thus, ASEAN has been reluctant to move towards formulating strong platform against China in the region. On the other hand, ASEAN wants to engage China in its multilateral mechanisms such as ARF and EAS. Therefore, the ASEAN demeanour to a much greater degree is involving coalition of regional powers in reducing the tension. China, with its grand designs to get the region into its sphere of influence, is ardently opposing external powers' intervention in the disputed territories of the South China Sea naming them as 'outsiders'. In the midst of all these growing tensions, Vietnam along with ASEAN has been engaging China in diffusing tension in the South China Sea. The leaders underscored the significance of the ASEAN cooperation, especially in promoting regional prosperity and handling trans-national challenges. Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung, during his visit to attend the ASEAN-US Summit at the Sunnylands Centre in California in February 2016, while expressing grave concern over the increasing militarization, threatening maritime and aviation safety and security in the region, he stated that, ASEAN countries hoped "to deepen collaboration with the US in various areas in order to take advantage of the country's support to build a dynamic, open, competitive and connected economy and narrow the development gap."<sup>36</sup>

Vietnam has quickly socialized into ASEAN community, and proves capable of playing a central role in the accomplishments of the association particularly in national security and socio-economic development. Vietnam is also working in tandem with major players in protecting and promoting regional interests and supporting further the ASEAN's decisive role in maintaining peace and security in the Southeast Asian region.

### CONCLUSION

Vietnam in 1990s reacted swiftly to the rapid changing regional and global political scenario sparked by the implosion of the former Soviet Union, with the chief intention to accelerate its reforms and to cultivate linkages with the Southeast Asian regional grouping. Vietnam succeeded in its efforts to secure ASEAN membership in 1995. Vietnam's membership in ASEAN helps its economy and hastens its integration into the world economy. Vietnam has long realised the need for deeper economic integration with ASEAN economies. ASEAN membership helped Vietnam to attract investments and expand volume of bilateral trade, along with multilateral relations. Vietnam's strong political and social

stability and economic growth is helping ASEAN to implement regional development programmes. Accession to ASEAN enabled Vietnam to get assistance in infrastructure development, technology transfer, education and tourism. Its growing involvement in the ASEAN process facilitated to gain invaluable organizational experience as well as exchange of dialogue and establishment of linkages with major powers.

Vietnam as a responsible member toed ASEAN line of resolving complex issues like disputes in the South China Sea, disasters and environmental management through dialogue and cooperation. Vietnam also subscribed to ASEAN strategy to develop multilateral relations with the US, China, Japan, Korea, Russia, Australia and India for ensuring the safety and freedom of sea lanes as per the UNCLOS so as to turn the region into an area of peace and tranquility. Vietnam, as ASEAN's potential member, chaired the ASEAN in 2010. Vietnam while celebrating 25 years of its membership in ASEAN will assume ASEAN Chair in 2020 to function to the huge expectations of its members and partners.

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