

Vietnam's Proactive International Integration: Case Studies in Defence Cooperation

Carlyle A. Thayer



India's Minister of Defence Manohar Parrikar and Vietnam's
Minister of National Defense Ngo Xuan Lich, Hanoi, June 5, 2016

Presentation to Section 1 Foreign Relations,
International Cooperation and Integration
5th International Conference on Vietnamese Studies
Hanoi, December 15-16, 2016

Vietnam's Proactive International Integration: Case Studies in Defence Cooperation

Carlyle A. Thayer*

Introduction

For the past twenty-five years Vietnam has pursued a policy of multilateralizing and diversifying its foreign relations. The genesis of this policy may be traced back to May 1988 when the Vietnam Communist Party (VCP) Political Bureau adopted Resolution No. 13 entitled, "On the Tasks and Foreign Policy in the New Situation." This resolution codified Vietnam's foreign policy objectives by giving priority to economic development and calling for a "multi-directional foreign policy" orientation with the goal of making "more friends, fewer enemies" (*them ban bot thu*).¹

Vietnam's multi-directional foreign policy was officially endorsed in the Secretary General's Political Report to the VCP's Seventh National Congress held in June 1991. The Political Report now called for Vietnam to "diversify and multilateralize economic relations with all countries and economic organizations . . . regardless of different socio-political systems."² Later political relations were included in Vietnam's policy of multilateralization and diversification of relations. For example, by 1995 Vietnam expanded the number of countries it had diplomatic relations with from twenty-three in 1989 to 163, including normalized relations with China, Japan, Europe and the United States.³

Vietnam's policy of multilateralizing and diversifying its foreign relations was endorsed by all subsequent national party congresses from the eighth (1996) to the most recent. For example, the Political Report to the Twelfth National Congress held in January 2016 stated, "To ensure successful implementation of foreign policy and international integration... consistently carry out the foreign policy of independence, autonomy,

* Emeritus Professor, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, The University of New South Wales at the Australian Defence Force Academy, Canberra. E-mail: c.thayer@adfa.edu.au.

¹ Nguyen Huu Cat, "Viet Nam Hoi Nhap vao Khu Vuc vi Hoa Binh va Phat Trien," *Nghien Cuu Dong Nam A*, February 1996, 28-29; Chu Van Chuc, "Qua trinh doi moi tu duy doi ngoai va hinh thanh duong loi doi ngoai doi moi," *Nghien Cuu Quoc Te*, 2004, 3:58, 9, 3-11; Luu Doan Huynh, "Vietnam-ASEAN Relations in Retrospect: A Few Thoughts," *Dialogue + Cooperation*, 2004, 1, 23-31; Nguyen Dy Nien, "Chinh Sach Van Hoat Dong Doi Ngoai Trong Thoi Ky Doi Moi," *Tap Chi Cong San*, 17(740), September 2005, 31-37; and Phan Doan Nam, "Ngoai Giao Viet Nam Sau 20 Nam Doi Moi," *Tap Chi Cong San*, July 2006, 14(760), 26-30.

² Communist Party of Vietnam, *7th National Congress Documents* (Hanoi: Vietnam Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1991), 134 and Vu Khoan, "Mot so van de quoc te cua dai hoi VII quan," in *Bo Ngoai Giao, Hoi nhap quoc te va giu vung ban sac* (Hanoi: Nha xuất bản chính trị quốc tế, 1995), 75.

³ Carlyle A. Thayer, "Vietnamese Diplomacy, 1975-2015: From Member of the Socialist Camp to Proactive International Integration," *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 2015, 1(3), 194-214.

peace, cooperation and development... [and] diversify and multilateralize external relations.”⁴

One key mechanism in Vietnam’s multilateral foreign policy is the promotion of strategic partnership agreements. Between 2001 and 2016 Vietnam reached strategic partnership agreements with sixteen countries, including all five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, and agreements on comprehensive partnerships with ten other countries, including Australia and the United States.

The purpose of strategic partnerships is to promote comprehensive cooperation across a number of areas and to give each major power equity in Vietnam’s stability and development in order to ensure Vietnam’s non-alignment and strategic autonomy.

A little studied aspect of Vietnam’s policy of multilateralizing and diversifying its foreign relations through strategic partnerships is Vietnam’s successful promotion of defence cooperation with its strategic partners. This paper analyzes Vietnam’s defense cooperation with the major powers, including Russia, India, Japan, China, the United States, United Kingdom and France after the Twelfth Party Congress in 2016.⁵

This paper is divided into three parts. Part 1 provides an assessment of Vietnam’s defence cooperation with the major powers up to 2015. Part 2 discusses developments in defence cooperation in 2016, after the 12th National Party Congress. Part 3 offers some conclusion.

Part 1 Providing Equity to the Major Powers

Policy Framework. In January 2016 Vietnam’s Cabinet approved the *Overall Strategy for International Integration Through 2020, Vision to 2030*.⁶ This document reviewed Vietnam’s bilateral strategic and comprehensive partnerships with twenty-five countries. It concluded that Vietnam had to make greater efforts to implement political commitments and to deepen cooperation under these agreements, including defence cooperation.

⁴ Nguyen Phu Trong, “Redouble Efforts to Build Our Party Clean and Strong; Promote the Entire Nation’s Strength and Socialist Democracy; Push Forward Comprehensively and Harmoniously the Renewal Process; Defend Firmly the Homeland and Maintain Sturdily a Peaceful and Stable Environment; and Strive for Ours to Soon Become Basically an Industrialized Country Toward Modernity,” Political Report to the Twelfth National Party Congress, January 2016. <https://m.vietnambreakingnews.com/2016/01/11th-party-central-committees-report-on-congress-documents/>.

⁵ In 2012 the author delivered a paper entitled “Vietnam on the Road to Global Integration: Forging Strategic Partnerships Through International Security Cooperation” to the 4th International Vietnamese Studies Conference in Hanoi. This was subsequently published in *Vietnam on the Road to Integration and Sustainable Development*, The Fourth International Conference on Vietnamese Studies. Hanoi: Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences and Vietnam National University, 2012. 206-214.

⁶ “Chiến lược tổng thể hội nhập quốc tế đến năm 2020, tầm nhìn 2030,” January 2016.

Russia Background to 2015. Vietnam negotiated its first strategic partnership agreement with the Russian Federation in March 2001 during the visit of President Vladimir Putin to Hanoi.⁷ This agreement set out broad-ranging cooperation in eight major areas including military equipment and technology.⁸ In 2008, Vietnam and Russia raised their annual defence dialogue to vice minister level. Between 2008 and 2013 Vietnam and Russia exchanged four visits by their defence ministers. Russian arms sales to Vietnam soon became the largest and most significant component of the strategic partnership, followed by energy (oil, gas, hydropower and nuclear).⁹

In July 2012, Vietnam and Russia raised their strategic partnership to a comprehensive strategic partnership on the occasion of a state visit to Moscow by President Truong Tan Sang.¹⁰ The following year, Russia and Vietnam exchanged visits by their defence ministers in March and August, respectively, and set up a Joint Working Group on defence cooperation. In March, Russia and Vietnam reached an agreement on cooperation in military technology until 2020, an increase in the number of defence scholarships (beyond 100 allocated annually) and an expansion in the fields of training offered to Vietnamese personnel.

In August 2013, Vietnam and Russia signed a five-year Memorandum of Understanding covering annual defence dialogues, military technology, professional military education and training,¹¹ assistance in weapons maintenance, joint venture service and the sale of twelve Sukhoi Su-30MKs multirole jet fighters.

Japan Background to 2015. October 2006, Prime Ministers Shinzo Abe and Nguyen Tan Dung issued a Joint Statement entitled “Toward a Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity in Asia.”¹² A year later, during an official visit by Vietnam’s president, Japan

⁷ Carlyle A. Thayer, “Vietnam On the Road to Global Integration: Forging Strategic Partnerships Through International Security Cooperation,” in *Vietnam on the Road to Integration and Sustainable Development, The Fourth International Conference on Vietnamese Studies*. Hanoi: Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences and Vietnam National University, 2012. 206-214.

⁸ The other areas of cooperation included: political-diplomatic, oil and gas cooperation, energy cooperation for hydro and nuclear power, trade and investment, science and technology, education and training, and culture and tourism.

⁹ Carlyle A. Thayer, ““Russia-Vietnam Relations,” Global Insider, *World Politics Review*, June, 8, 2011. <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/trend-lines/9099/global-insider-russia-vietnam-relations>; Carlyle A. Thayer, “Russian Subs in Vietnam,” U.S. Naval Institute, August 21, 2012. <http://news.usni.org/news-analysis/news/russian-subs-vietnam>; Carl Thayer, “With Russia’s Help, Vietnam Adopts A2/AD Strategy,” *The Diplomat*, October 8, 2013. <http://thediplomat.com/flashpoints-blog/2013/10/08/with-russias-help-vietnam-adopts-a2ad-strategy/>.

¹⁰ Carlyle A. Thayer, “The Russia-Vietnam Comprehensive Partnership,” *East Asia Forum*, October 9, 2012. <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2012/10/09/the-russia-vietnam-comprehensive-partnership/>.

¹¹ Russia agreed to provide 600 graduate and post-grad scholarships in 2014, and 790 scholarships in 2015.

¹² Carl Thayer “Vietnam’s Extensive Strategic Partnership with Japan,” *The Diplomat*, October 14, 2014. <http://thediplomat.com/2014/10/vietnams-extensive-strategic-partnership-with-japan/>.

and Vietnam issued a Joint Statement that included a forty-fourpoint Agenda Toward a Strategic Partnership. The Agenda was divided into seven substantive areas. Point four on security and defence cooperation included exchanges of military delegations, high-level defence officials' visits, and goodwill ship port calls by the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF).¹³

In 2011 Japan and Vietnam adopted a MOU On Bilateral Defence Cooperation and Exchange that outlined a Plan of Action including the reciprocal opening of Defence Attaché Offices and an annual Defence Policy Dialogue. Six high-level dialogues have been conducted, the most recent in Tokyo on December 4, 2015 at deputy foreign minister level.

Since 2011, bilateral defence cooperation has developed considerable breadth and depth. It includes: high-level exchanges and consultations between Defence Ministers, Chiefs of Staff, Service Chiefs, and expert-level exchanges; naval port visits¹⁴; human resource development; maritime security and safety; United Nations peacekeeping training; military aviation and pilot training, safety; non-traditional security (humanitarian assistance/disaster relief or HA/DR, search and rescue, counter-terrorism, anti-piracy, cyber crime); information technology; military medicine; salvage operations; unexploded ordnance removal; and military technology.

In March 2014, Vietnam and Japan raised their bilateral relations to an Extensive Strategic Partnership in an agreement running to sixty-nine paragraphs. As a follow up, Nguyen Phu Trong, Secretary General of the Vietnam Communist Party, made his first official visit to Japan at the invitation of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. At the end of their talks the two leaders issued a thirty-one point Joint Vision Statement. The section on political, security and defence relations stated:

9. The two leaders shared the intention to strengthen cooperation in security and defense by promoting visits and interactions at various levels, enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of dialogue mechanisms, actively coordinating to implement bilateral security and defense agreements, and strengthening cooperation in the field of human resource training.

10. The two sides share the intention to enhance cooperation in maritime safety and security, such as in search-and-rescue, and in deal with the non-traditional security issues, such as cyber security, cybercrime, terrorism, transnational organized crime, piracy, etc. The sides signed a Memorandum of Cooperation between Coast Guard Agencies.

11. Japan affirmed its continued assistance to help Viet Nam enhance its capacity of maritime law enforcement agencies, address post war unexploded ordnance clearance and participate in UN

¹³ Point four of the Agenda addressed defence cooperation exchanges, cooperation in policy dialogue, comprehensive economic partnership; improvement of the legal system and administrative reforms; science and technology; climate change, environment, natural resources and technology; mutual understanding between the peoples of the two countries; and cooperation in the international arena

¹⁴ June 2014, during the HD981 crisis, a Japanese Landing Ship Dock visited Tien Sa, Da Nang as part of US Navy's Pacific Partnership.

peacekeeping operations. The defense authorities of both countries signed the Memorandum of Cooperation on UN Peacekeeping operation[s].¹⁵

On November 6, 2015, Japan's Defence Minister Gen Nakatani met with his counterpart, Minister of National Defence General Phung Quang Thanh in Hanoi. They

agreed to boost high-ranking visits and exchanges between the two defence ministries, enhance the efficiency of dialogue and consultation mechanisms, promote cooperation in education and training, and effectively implement the "MOU on defence cooperation in UN peacekeeping operations", ensuring freedom of navigation and aviation.¹⁶

General Thanh invited the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force to visit Cam Ranh International Port (CRIP) and to hold their first HA/DR training exercises.¹⁷ Minister Nakatani then made a visit to the international port at Cam Ranh.

In December, Japan dispatched its first Ministry of Defense delegation specifically focused on UN peacekeeping to Hanoi to meet with officials from Vietnam's Peace Keeping Centre to work out Japanese assistance in training Vietnamese peacekeeping units prior to deployment.

India Background to 2015. In July 2007, India and Vietnam adopted a thirty-three point Joint Declaration on Strategic Partnership that mapped out cooperation in five major areas including defense and security cooperation.¹⁸ Six areas of defence cooperation were identified: strategic dialogue at vice ministerial level; defense supplies, joint projects, training cooperation and intelligence exchanges; exchange visits between defense and security establishments; capacity building, technical assistance and information sharing with particular attention to security of sea lanes, anti-piracy, prevention of pollution and search and rescue; counter terrorism and cyber security; and non-traditional security.¹⁹ Also in 2007, Vietnam and India signed a MOU on Defence Cooperation that led to an annual strategic dialogue and a series of high-level exchange visits.

The election of Narendra Modi as Prime Minister of India in May 2014 injected new momentum in their bilateral strategic partnership. For example, President Pranab

¹⁵ Joint Vision Statement on Japan – Viet Nam Relation, Tokyo, September 15, 2015,

¹⁶ "Vietnam and Japan to boost defence cooperation," *People's Army Newspaper Online*, November 6, 2015.

¹⁷ Associated Press, "Japan's maritime force conducts joint drills with Vietnam's navy in South China Sea base."

¹⁸ The other areas of included: closer economic cooperation and commercial engagement; science and technology cooperation, cultural and technical cooperation and multilateral and regional cooperation. See: Carl Thayer, "How Vietnam Woos China and India Simultaneously," *The Diplomat*, October 28, 2014. <http://thediplomat.com/2014/10/how-vietnam-woos-china-and-india-simultaneously/>; and Carl Thayer, "India and Vietnam Advance Their Strategic Partnership," *The Diplomat*, December 11, 2014. <http://thediplomat.com/2014/12/india-and-vietnam-advance-their-strategic-partnership/>.

¹⁹ Since 2007, defense cooperation has included high-level visits, an annual Defense Strategy Dialogue, naval port visits and two lines of credit totaling US\$600 million for defense acquisitions including Offshore Patrol Vessels.

Mukherjee visited Hanoi in September. At the conclusion of his state visit he issued a joint statement with his counterpart President Truong Tan Sang that declared, “cooperation in national defense was an important pillar in their strategic partnership.” To underscore this point Mukherjee announced that India would make available to Vietnam a \$100 million line of credit to facilitate defense procurement over the next fifteen years. Mukherjee also agreed to expand military training and assist the Vietnam People’s Navy to develop strike capabilities.

Vietnam’s Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung made an official visit to India in October 2014 and was welcomed by Prime Minister Modi who noted, “it is no surprise that Vietnam has been at the forefront of our efforts [to Act East]... We have a shared interest in maritime security, including freedom of navigation and commerce and peaceful settlement of disputes in accordance with international law.” To underscore this point, Modi declared:

Our defense cooperation with Vietnam is among our most important ones. India remains committed to the modernization of Vietnam’s defense and security forces. This will include expansion of our training program, which is already very substantial, joint exercises and cooperation in defense equipment. We will quickly operationalize the 100 million dollars Line of Credit that will enable Vietnam to acquire new naval vessels from India. We have also agreed to enhance our security cooperation, including counter-terrorism.

In May 2015, Vietnam and India signed a Joint Vision Statement on Defence Relations. Defense cooperation is quite comprehensive and includes: high-level exchange visits, an annual security dialogue, service-to-service interaction, professional military education and training (reciprocal languages, intelligence, UN peacekeeping, jungle and mountain warfare, submariner basic course, Su-30 pilot conversion²⁰), naval port visits,²¹ ship construction and provision of spare parts, training and capacity building, assistance in maintaining military equipment (repair, maintenance and fuel), defence co-production, multilateral exercises (humanitarian assistance/disaster relief and search and rescue), and cooperation at regional forums such as the ASEAN Defense Ministers’ Meeting Plus.

China Background to 2015.

In 2008, seventeen years after the normalization of relations, the leaders of Vietnam and China raised their bilateral relations to a strategic partnership. A year later this was upgraded to a strategic cooperative partnership and established a Joint Land Border Committee.²² In 2013, Vietnam and China raised their bilateral relations to a comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership, the highest designation among all of Vietnam’s strategic partners.

As strategic partners China and Vietnam have developed a dense network of party, state, defense and multilateral mechanisms to manage their relations. A Joint Steering

²⁰ Financial arrangements for pilot training are still under discussion, see: Ritu Sharma, “Jet set no go: Plan to train Vietnam sukhoi pilots grounded,” *The New Indian Express*, November 20, 2016.

²¹ In September 2015 INS *Sahyadri* made a goodwill visit to Da Nang.

²² Thayer, “How Vietnam Woos China and India Simultaneously.”

Committee at deputy prime minister level oversees their bilateral relations. In March 2014 and Vietnam and China inaugurated a Border Defence Friendship Exchange program at deputy minister level. The second Border Defence Exchange took place in May 2015 when it was raised to defence minister level.

Strategic trust between Vietnam and China was seriously undermined in May 2014 when China deployed a mega oil-drilling platform, the HD 981, in Vietnam's Exclusive Economic Zone. In July 2014 China withdrew the HD 981 and tensions abated.

China received a special envoy of the Secretary General of the Vietnam Communist Party. This was followed in October by a visit by a high-level delegation of thirteen senior Vietnamese general led by Minister of National Defence General Phung Quang Thanh. A hot line was set up between the two defence ministries. Over the course of 2014-15 forty-nine joint land border patrols were conducted. In August 2015, the fifth China-Vietnam Strategic Defence Dialogue at vice ministerial level met.

United States Background to 2015. Bilateral defence cooperation between Vietnam and the United States were slow to develop after the normalization of relations in July 1995. In 2003 both countries agreed to start triennial exchange visits by Defence Ministers on alternate basis. In 2009, the United States made its first naval port visit to Vietnam.

Bilateral defence relations were significantly upgraded in August 2010 with the inauguration of the first annual Defense Policy Dialogue at deputy defence minister level. On September 20, 2011, the U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for South and Southeast Asia and Vietnam's Deputy Minister for National Defence signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Advancing Bilateral Defense Cooperation at the 2nd Defense Policy Dialogue. The MOU set out five priority areas for cooperation: maritime security, search and rescue, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, exchanges between defense universities and research institutes, and UN peacekeeping operations.

In July 2013, Vietnam and the United States adopted a Joint Statement on Comprehensive Partnership during the state visit by President Truong Tan Sang to Washington.²³ Nine major areas of cooperation were including defence and security cooperation.²⁴ Section six of the Joint Statement on Comprehensive Partnership stated:

The two leaders agreed that the United States and Vietnam would continue to cooperate on defense and security. They expressed satisfaction with the Memorandum of Understanding on Advancing Bilateral Defense Cooperation of 2011 and reaffirmed their commitment to its full

²³ Carl Thayer, "The U.S.-Vietnam Comprehensive Partnership: What's in a Name?," *The Strategist*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute Blog, July 31, 2013, <http://www.aspistrategist.org.au/the-us-vietnam-comprehensive-partnership-whats-in-a-name/> and Carl Thayer, "The U.S.-Vietnam Comprehensive Partnership: What's in a Name?," *cogitASIA*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, July 30, 2013. <http://cogitasia.com/the-u-s-vietnam-comprehensive-partnership-whats-in-a-name/>.

²⁴ The other areas included: political and diplomatic relations, trade and economic ties, science and technology, education and training, environment and health, war legacy issues, protection and promotion of human rights, and culture, sports, and tourism.

implementation. The Presidents agreed to continue the U.S.-Vietnam Defense Policy Dialogue and the bilateral Political, Security, and Defense dialogue as opportunities to review the defense and security relationship and discuss future cooperation. The two Presidents agreed to expand mutually beneficial cooperation to enhance capabilities such as search and rescue and disaster response. The Presidents also underscored the importance of enhanced cooperation in non-traditional security matters and agreed to work more closely to counter terrorism; enhance maritime law enforcement cooperation; combat transnational crime including piracy, and narcotics, human, and wildlife trafficking; and address high-tech crime and cyber security. President Obama welcomed Vietnam's decision to participate in United Nations peacekeeping operations and emphasized the United States' desire to assist with training and other support for this effort through the Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI).²⁵

In October 2014, the U.S. State Department announced the lifting on the sale of lethal weapons to Vietnam on a case-by-case basis. This partial lifting of arms sales was restricted to defence articles related to maritime security and was aimed at improving Vietnam's maritime domain awareness and maritime security capabilities.

On June 1, 2015, bilateral defence cooperation witnessed another major advance when the defence ministers of Vietnam and the United States, Phung Quang Thanh and Ashton Carter respectively, adopted the Joint Vision Statement on Defense Relations. This statement outlined twelve areas and forms of cooperation:

1. Conduct increased cooperative activities to enhance trust and mutual understanding;
2. Collaborate in multilateral fora and organizations – including ASEAN – when it is in their common interest;
3. Strengthen the capabilities of our defense institutions and militaries to enhance cooperation, promote security, and address non-traditional security threats;
4. Expand defense trade between our countries, potentially including cooperation in the production of new technologies and equipment, where possible under current law and restrictions;
5. Expand collaboration on maritime security and maritime domain awareness, including where possible, port visits and voyage repair visits to ports and facilities of each country, as mutually identified;
6. Expand training and educational opportunities of each country's military academic institutions;
7. Strengthen the ability of each country to conduct search and rescue activities and respond quickly to disasters and provide humanitarian response;
8. Assist in building capacity to conduct successful United Nations peacekeeping operations;
9. Increase exchanges of information and best practices on topics of mutual interest, including science and defense technology exchanges;

²⁵ Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, "Joint Statement by President Barack Obama of the United States of America and President Truong Tan Sang of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam," July 25, 2013. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/07/25/joint-statement-president-barack-obama-united-states-america-and-preside>.

10. Enhance cooperation to overcome the legacies from the war;
11. Continue strategic-level discussions by senior leadership from each side's defense ministry on international security issues of mutual interest; and
12. Welcome regular exchanges of defense leadership to each country.²⁶

A month later U.S.-Vietnam political relations were raised to a new level with the adoption of a Joint Vision Statement on July 7 by President Obama and VCP Secretary General Nguyen Phu Trong. The two leaders affirmed

Both countries underscore their commitment to collaborating on, among other issues, addressing non-traditional security threats, cooperation in maritime security, maritime domain awareness, defense trade and information sharing, search and rescue, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, and defense technology exchange. Both countries welcome joint efforts to address war legacy issues, including the humanitarian mission of missing in action (MIA) recovery, the clearance of unexploded ordinance and dioxin remediation, and further assistance for these humanitarian efforts.

In fiscal year 2015-16, under the Maritime Security Initiative, the United States allocated \$40.1 million to Vietnam for the purchase of maritime defence equipment, specifically to assist in training, maritime intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, command and control in its maritime enforcement agencies, and bilateral humanitarian assistance/disaster relief exercises to promote interoperability.

United Kingdom Background to 2015.

In 2010, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Pham Gia Khiem visited London and met with Foreign Secretary William Hague. At the end of their discussions the two officials issued a Joint Declaration establishing the Vietnam-United Kingdom (UK) Strategic Partnership. The Joint Declaration identified seven priority areas including security and defence.²⁷ According to defence industry sources, the strategic partnership agreement included cooperation among strategic industries including aerospace (BAE Systems) and defence.²⁸

On October 26, 2010, Vietnam and the United Kingdom held their 1st Strategic Dialogue in London at deputy ministerial level. The agenda for this meeting included bilateral issues, defence cooperation, organised crime, counter terrorism and regional security. According to the joint communiqué issued after the dialogue, "the Ministers looked forward to closer defence cooperation, including more frequent exchange of

²⁶"U.S.-Viet Nam Joint Vision Statement on Defense Relations Between the Department of Defense of the United States of America and the Ministry of National Defense of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam," http://photos.state.gov/libraries/vietnam/8621/pdf-forms/usvn_defense_relations_jvs2015.pdf.

²⁷ The other areas of cooperation were: political-diplomatic, regional and global issues, trade and investment, sustainable socio-economic development, education, training, science and technology, and people-to-people exchange.

²⁸ Jon Grevatt, "UK and Vietnam ink strategic industrial partnership pledge," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, September 13, 2010.

delegations and the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding on defence cooperation.”

A year later, on November 24, 2011, Vietnam and the UK signed a MOU on defence cooperation on the occasion of the three-day working visit to London by Deputy Minister for National Defence Lt. General Nguyen Chi Vinh. The MOU provided a framework for the conduct of bilateral defence relations and cooperation including the exchange of views and information on defence-related matters, exchange of high-level delegations, defence industry cooperation, and training and education for officers and technical staff.

The British Ambassador to Vietnam, Anthony Stokes, noted that the MOU covered three specific areas: political-defence cooperation, research, and military equipment supply. According to Ambassador Stokes, Vietnam and the UK will hold regular defence dialogues at senior level; he also underscored that there was scope for Britain’s defence and security industry to supply military equipment to Vietnam.²⁹ The MOU also included setting up a Joint Defence Working Group to promote defence industry cooperation, the provision of professional military education and training, and collaboration in research on defence strategy and military technique.

On March 28, 2012 Vietnam and the UK signed the 2012 Action Plan to further their strategic partnership. The Action Plan included a provision for stepping up defence cooperation in training, defence trade and peace support operations.³⁰ In May of the same year, the Royal College of Defence Studies dispatched a delegation to Vietnam led by its deputy commander Major General Andrew Kennet. The delegation was received by Deputy Minister of National Defence Lt. General Nguyuen Chi Vinh.

In November 2013, the UK posted its first Defence Attaché to Hanoi. Between 2012 and 2014 over one hundred VPA officers and defence staff completed training courses in Hanoi organised by the UK.

On January 8, 2015, the UK and Vietnam held their third annual Defence Working Group meeting in Hanoi to discuss cooperation for that year. According to the British Embassy in a statement released on January 9:

Defence industrial cooperation was identified as the most significant area for increased bilateral engagement, and [an] agreement was struck to inaugurate a specific task force to advance and pursue defence industry collaboration.

During 2015 this will focus on the maritime domain, using it as a ‘proving ground’ for developing a clearer mutual understanding of the sales and procurement processes of each nation, sharing

²⁹ Thuy Ngan, “Ambassador hopeful about VN-UK cooperation,” *Tuoi Tre News*, December 8, 2011.

³⁰ Jon Grevatt, “Vietnam and UK agree defence co-operation action plan,” *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, March 29, 2012.

information on future defense capability requirements, and developing a strategy for enhancing sales and procurement opportunities.³¹

The Defence Working Group agreed to step up visits by senior defence delegations, to cooperate in training and cyber security, and to exchange information relating to hydrography and geospace.³² The UK Ministry of Defence announced it would step up funding for English-language training programs by three hundred percent in 2015 and offer training courses at the Royal College of Defence Studies to Vietnamese senior officers.

On November 4, 2015, Air Chief Marshal Stuart Peace, Vice Chief of the Defence Staff, paid a working visit to Vietnam where he met with Lt. General Vo Van Tuan, Deputy Chief of the VPA General Staff. Air Chief Peace was received by General Do Ba Ty, Chief of the VPA General Staff. General Ty suggested the two sides should “continue to effectively implement the MoU on the bilateral cooperation ties inked in November 2011, promote the bilateral working group on defence ties, as well as step up exchanges to put forward the signing of cooperation agreements on training, defence industry and peacekeeping.”³³

France Background to 2015. From 24-26 September 2013, Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung made an official visit to France. After his meeting with his counterpart, Jean-Marc Ayrault, they issued a Joint Statement on Viet Nam-France Strategic Partnership. This document outlined five broad areas of cooperation, including national defence and security.³⁴ The Joint Statement provided for regular strategic dialogues between their respective ministries of foreign affairs and defence at deputy minister level. With respect to defence cooperation:

the two sides agree to increase the exchange of delegations of all levels, while strengthening the operation of the Joint Committee on defence cooperation and perfecting the cooperation in personnel training, military medicine and equipment as well as visits of military ships.

France will assist Viet Nam in taking part in the United Nations’ peace-keeping operations.

Both countries share the desire to enhance cooperation in the defence industry. They reiterated their commitment to fighting the proliferation of mass destructive weapons.³⁵

³¹ Quoted in Jon Grevatt, “Vietnam and UK form defence trade task force,” *Jane’s Defence Industry*, February 1, 2015.

³² “UK, Vietnam discuss bilateral defence cooperation in 2015,” *People’s Army Newspaper Online*, January 10, 2015.

³³ “Vietnam-UK boost defence ties,” *People’s Army Newspaper Online*, November 4, 2015.

³⁴ The other areas of cooperation included: politics-diplomacy; economics-trade and investment; development; and culture-education-training-scientific research-law-justice.

³⁵ “Viet Nam France Issue Joint Statement,” VietnamPlus, September 25, 2013; <http://www.mofa.gov.vn/en/nr040807104143/nr040807105001/ns130926101122>.

Part 3 Developments Since the 12th National Party Congress

Visits by Head of State/Government

In 2016, Vietnam's top leaders visited Russia and China and hosted visits by the presidents of the United States and France and the prime minister of India. Vietnam also utilized ASEAN and APEC summit meetings to hold discussions with their counterparts on the sidelines. This section presents a chronological review of these high-level meetings by heads of state and government.

Russia. From 16-18 May, Vietnam's newly elected Prime Minister, Nguyen Xuan Phuc, made an official visit to Russia to meet with Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev. According to the Vietnamese media Phuc and Medvedev "affirmed the continuation of co-operation in defence-security, particularly in military techniques."³⁶ Phuc also attended the Commemorative Summit to mark the twentieth anniversary of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)-Russia Dialogue.

United States. From 23-25 May 2016, President Barack Obama made an official visit to Vietnam at the invitation of President Tran Dai Quang. In Hanoi Obama announced the lifting of all restrictions on arms sales to Vietnam.

The two presidents adopted a Joint Statement on 23 May that set out six areas for future defence cooperation: humanitarian cooperation (recovers of the remains of soldiers missing in action), war legacy (unexploded ordnance, dioxin remediation, maritime security, UN peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, and security and defence cooperation. The two presidents

reaffirmed their commitment to strengthen defense cooperation between the two countries as outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding on Advancing Bilateral Defense Cooperation in 2011 and the U.S.-Vietnam Joint Vision Statement on Defense Relations signed in 2015, giving priority to humanitarian cooperation, war legacy, maritime security, peacekeeping, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. Both sides reiterated they would continue to strengthen cooperation in the fields of security, combatting transnational crime, and cyber security. Vietnam welcomed the U.S. government decision to fully lift the ban on the sale of lethal weapons to Vietnam. Vietnam welcomed U.S. maritime security assistance – including through the Maritime Security Initiative (MSI), the Cooperative Threat Reduction program, and Foreign Military Financing – and looked forward to working with the United States to enhance Vietnam's maritime capabilities. The United States and Vietnam signed a letter of intent to establish a working group for the Cooperative Humanitarian and Medical Storage Initiative (CHAMSI), which will advance cooperation on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. The United States reaffirmed its support for Vietnam's peacekeeping efforts with an aim of assisting Vietnam's first deployment of UN peacekeeping forces by 2017.

Both countries expressed their satisfaction with their joint efforts to advance humanitarian and war legacy issues. In particular, the United States valued Vietnam's active cooperation to support the humanitarian mission of providing the fullest possible accounting for U.S. personnel still missing from the war. Both sides committed to continue their cooperation on unexploded ordnance removal. Vietnam welcomed cooperation leading to the successful conclusion of the first phase of dioxin

³⁶ "VN, Russia agree to intensify comprehensive strategic ties," *Viet Nam News*, May 16, 2016.

remediation at Danang International Airport, with the final phase already underway. The United States committed to partnering with Vietnam to make a significant contribution to the clean-up of dioxin contamination at Bien Hoa Air Base.³⁷

India. In early September, during the course of an official visit by Prime Minister Modi to Hanoi, Vietnam and India raised their bilateral relations to a comprehensive strategic partnership. The first section on political relations defence and security stated:

The two Prime Ministers expressed satisfaction at the significant progress made in defence cooperation including exchange of high level visits, annual high-level dialogue, service-to-service cooperation, naval ship visits, extensive training and capability building, defence equipment procurement and related transfer of technology, and cooperation at regional for a such as ADMM-Plus.³⁸

France. From 5-7 September, President Francois Hollande made an official visit to Vietnam for discussions with his counterpart, President Quang, VCP Secretary General Nguyen Phu Trong, Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc and Chair of the National Assembly, Nguyen Thi Kim Ngan.

On the eve of President Hollande's visit, President Quang gave an interview to Agence France-Presse in which he emphasized that "[d]efence cooperation has become one of the pillars in the strategic partnership between Vietnam and France and will be broadened in the coming time."³⁹ Quang also suggested that the two countries should adopt a common vision of defence cooperation to make it more effective. He suggested that Vietnam and France could cooperate in "United Nations peacekeeping missions; ensuring security and safety and freedom of navigation and overflight, and solving issues relating to cyber security and non-conventional security issues."⁴⁰

On 6 September Quang and Hollande held a joint press conference where they announced agreement "to develop a long-term vision for cooperation that could ensure their common interests. To do that, political connections [sic] need first to be tightened" and "to enhance defence co-operation through dialogue on defence strategy, the procurement of military equipment and visits by naval ships."⁴¹

³⁷ Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, "Joint Statement: Between the United States of America and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam," May 23, 2016; <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/05/23/joint-statement-between-united-states-america-and-socialist-republic>.

³⁸ "Viet Nam, India Issues Joint Statement," full text of the Joint Statement, *Viet Nam News*, September 3, 2016.

³⁹ Vietnam News Agency, "VN-France defence cooperation to be reinforced: President," *People's Army Newspaper Online*, August 25, 2016.

⁴⁰ VietnamNet, "Vietnam, France to strike major deals during Hollande's visit," *Sai Gon Times*, August 26, 2016.

⁴¹ Socialist Republic of Vietnam, Ministry of National Defence, "State visit creates new impulse for Vietnam-French strategic partnership," *Bao Quoc Phong*, September 7, 2016 and "Vietnam, France work out measures to foster relations," *Bao Quoc Phong*, September 9, 2016.

Quang also noted that, “France would assist Vietnam with United Nations peacekeeping operations and co-operate to deal with marine and aviation security issues.”⁴² Hollande stated he hoped his visit would “give a breath of fresh air to the countries’ strategic partnership” and that “the two leaders wanted to solidify this partnership in politics and hold more dialogue between the two defence ministries so as to jointly solve regional and global problems.”⁴³

China. From 10-15, September, Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc made an official visit to Beijing for a meeting with his counterpart Premier Li Keqiang. The joint communiqué issued after their talks was wide-ranging. With respect to defence cooperation the communiqué stated, “The Vietnamese and Chinese leaders concurred in fostering cooperation in diplomacy, defence, security and law enforcement.” Phuc also attended the 13th China-ASEAN Expo in Nanning.

During Phuc’s visit, Deputy Defence Minister Nguyen Chi Vinh met with Deputy Chief of the General Staff Department Qi Jianguo. They agreed “to continue enhancing border exchange programs and working out new and effective cooperation mechanisms so as to beef up defense cooperation on a par with the comprehensive strategic partnership...”⁴⁴

Sideline Meetings. In September, Prime Ministers Nguyen Xuan Phuc and Shinzo Abe met on the sidelines of the ASEAN summit in Vientiane. In November, President Tran Dai Quang met with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on the sidelines of the APEC summit in Lima, Peru. Both leaders reaffirmed their commitment to the peaceful resolution of maritime disputes in the South China Sea.⁴⁵

Visits by Defence Ministers

In 2016 Vietnam exchanged visits by defence ministers with Russia, China and India and hosted a visit by the French defence minister.

Russia. In March, Russia’s Defence Minister, General Sergei Shoigu, visited Hanoi for discussions with his counterpart, newly installed Minister of National Defence General Ngo Xuan Lich. Shoigu also visited Cam Ranh Bay. General Lich made his first overseas visit as defence minister in April. Lich and Shoigu discussed fulfilling defence agreements already signed, mutual support in international forums, cooperation in military training and further arms sales. Lich also addressed the 5th Moscow

⁴² Socialist Republic of Vietnam, Ministry of National Defence, “State visit creates new impulse for Vietnam-French strategic partnership.”

⁴³ Socialist Republic of Vietnam, Ministry of National Defence, “State visit creates new impulse for Vietnam-French strategic partnership.”

⁴⁴ “Vietnam, China to boost border guard exchanges,” *People’s Army Newspaper Online*, September 11, 2016 and Viet Nam News Agency, “Vietnam, China continue to bolster cross-border defence cooperation,” September 12, 2016.

⁴⁵ Kyodo, “Japan, Vietnam reiterate joint efforts to peacefully resolve South China Sea disputes,” *South China Morning Post*, November 21, 2016.

International Security Conference.

China. In March 2016, Vietnam and China co-hosted the third Border Defence Friendship Exchange. This involved the exchange visits by their respective defence ministers. China's Defence Minister Senior Lt. Gen. Chang Wanquan visited Hanoi from 26-28 March for a meeting with his counterpart, Minister of National Defence General Phung Quang Thanh. Thanh stated that the two sides "will see more military exchanges in the areas of personnel training, border cooperation, academic research, UN peacekeeping, and national defense industry..."⁴⁶

Chang also met with Senior Lt. General Ngo Xuan Lich, then the chief of the VPA's General Political Department, and VCP Secretary General Nguyen Phu Trong. Trong "suggested that the two sides continue to maintain high-level contact and effectively carry out defence cooperation mechanisms such as defence policy dialogue, joint patrol on the Tonkin Gulf and along the land border, and defence exchange..."⁴⁷ Minister Chang responded by suggesting that the two armed forces should "increase high level exchanges and strategic communication, increase friendly feelings, deepen border defense exchanges and practical cooperation on U.N. peacekeeping, military academic research and the defense industry."⁴⁸

On 30 March, General Thanh led a high-ranking defence delegation to Pingxiang, Guangxi province to take part in the third Border Defence Friendship Exchange program. He was greeted on arrival by his counterpart Sr. Lt. General Chang. The two ministers observed a joint border patrol and watched a martial arts performance and an exhibition of anti-terrorism combat techniques by local military forces.⁴⁹

In August, Vietnam's new Defence Minister, General Ngo Xuan Lich led a high-level defence delegation on his first official visit to China at the invitation of his counterpart, Sr. Lt. General Chang. The two ministers discussed the fourth Border Defence Friendship Exchange to be held in April 2017, and called for the expansion of the border guard cooperation model, the continuation of high-level exchanges and defence strategic dialogues at deputy ministerial level, annual defence exchanges including naval port visits and exchanges by junior officers. The two ministers signed a MOU on cooperation between the Institute for Military Strategy and China's Academy of Military

⁴⁶ Xinhua, "China, Vietnam vow to boost trust at high-level border meeting," May 31, 2016.

⁴⁷ Viet New Agency, "Vietnam, China defence ministers hold talks," *Vietnamnet*, March 28, 2016.

⁴⁸ China's Ministry of Defence quoted by Reuters, "Amid sea dispute, China calls for deeper defense ties with Vietnam," March 28, 2016. The Vietnamese media reported that Minister Chang "expressed his wish for more exchanges in high-level visits and military research, defence technology cooperation and border friendship exchanges between the two armies." Viet Nam News Agency, "Vietnam, China defence ministers hold talks," *Vietnamnet*, March 28, 2016.

⁴⁹ "Vietnam-China Border Defence Friendship Exchange's activities continued in China," *People's Army Newspaper Online*, March 31, 2016.

Science.⁵⁰ Lich paid courtesy calls on Li Yuanchao, Vice President, and Fan Changlong, Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission.

India. In June, India's Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar made a two-day trip to Vietnam for discussions with his counterpart General Ngo Xuan Lich. He later visited the Information Technology and Foreign Languages Centre at the Signal Officers Training School in Nha Trang. The Centre was set up in June 2015 with Indian assistance. At the meeting of the two defence ministers Parrikar agreed to commence with phase two of Indian assistance to the Information Technology and Foreign Languages Centre by funding the construction of a software park for the Vietnamese military. After Parrikar's visit the Indian Navy and the Vietnam People's Navy signed the Technical Agreement on Non-Military Maritime Information Sharing.⁵¹

In reciprocation, Defence Minister Lich paid a visit to India from 3-7 December to confer with his counterpart Parrikar. Lich headed a delegation of thirty persons including the Deputy Chief of the General Staff and the commanders of the air force and navy. General Lich also held meetings with Ajit Doval, the National Security Advisor, and Prime Minister Modi.⁵²

The two ministers reported that they were pleased "at the results of their defense cooperation, especially the strict and active implementation of the signed cooperation agreements" that flowed from "effective cooperation mechanisms such as the Deputy Ministerial-level Defense Policy Dialogue, Bilateral Defense Cooperation Working Groups Meeting and Naval Officers Consultation."⁵³

India-Vietnam defense cooperation is carried out under the framework of the Joint Vision Statement on Vietnam-India Defense Cooperation form 2015-2020. The two ministers agreed to implement the following:

Continue to maintain and increase the frequency of visits at all levels. In the upcoming time, India continues to assist Vietnam to train officers in the fields where Vietnam needs. Vietnam is willing to receive an unlimited number of Indian trainees to study Vietnamese language or attend courses for international senior officers at the Vietnamese National Defense Academy.

On cooperation between services, the two sides continue to discuss the needs and ability to work out pragmatic cooperation contents, attaching importance to naval cooperation so as to be able to implement joint maritime search and rescue activities and the Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea...⁵⁴

⁵⁰ "VN, China agree to deepen defence ties," *Viet Nam News*, August 31, 2016.

⁵¹ Tran Tuan, "Vietnam high-ranking military delegation visits India," *People's Army Newspaper Online*, December 6, 2016.

⁵² Rajaram Panda, "Increasing Synergy In India-Vietnam Ties – Analysis," *Eurasia Review*, December 7, 2017.

⁵³ Tran Tuan, "Vietnam high-ranking military delegation visits India."

⁵⁴ Tran Tuan, "Vietnam high-ranking military delegation visits India."

At the conclusion of the talks the ministers witnessed the signing of an agreement by the Commander of Vietnam's Air Defence-Air Force and India's Chairman of the Joint Staff Committee and Commander of the Indian Air Force. Under the terms of this agreement India will provide basic and advanced training for Vietnamese Su-30 pilots and assist in repair and maintenance of this aircraft. The details of this agreement are to be worked out in the expectation that the first Vietnamese pilots will commence training in early 2017. In addition an MOU on Peacekeeping and a MOU on exchange of delegations were also signed.⁵⁵

During Lich's visit bilateral meetings were held between the respective commanders of the Air force, Army, Navy and the Indian T & G Group.⁵⁶

According to media reports the sale of the India-Russia BrahMos cruise missile were not clarified and are still under discussion. These reports also noted that India has already agreed "in principle" to the sale but needed Russian concurrence.⁵⁷

France. From 5-7 June, France's Defence Minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian, made an official visit to Hanoi to discuss a strategic partnership agreement with his counterpart, General Ngo Xuan Lich. The two ministers agree to step up cooperation in "traditional areas," to exchange experiences on joining UN peacekeeping and safety of navigation and aviation, and facilitate defence industry cooperation. Significantly, the two ministers agreed to establish a strategic partnership in defence.⁵⁸ Lich also stated Vietnam's willingness to act as a bridge between France and ASEAN.⁵⁹ Le Drian paid a courtesy call on President Tran Dai Quang.

Other Defence Exchanges

During 2016 Vietnam hosted eleven visits by overseas defence delegations from India (1), Japan (2), China (4) and the United States (4). Vietnam also dispatched a high-level Vietnamese defence delegation to London. Vietnam received a delegation of Indian junior officers and exchange visits of junior officers with China.

Japan. In January 2016, Vietnam hosted the Third Vietnam-Japan Dialogue of Infantry Staff Officers. In February, a delegation from Japan's Ministry of Defense visited the Center for Information and Technology and Foreign Languages at Vietnam's Signal Officers' Training School. The Centre is responsible for IT research, IT application, IT transfer, foreign language training for both civilians and military personnel, and the

⁵⁵ Panda, "Increasing Synergy In India-Vietnam Ties."

⁵⁶ Tran Tuan, "General Ngo Xuan Lich's official visit to India wraps up successfully," *People's Army Newspaper Online*, December 8, 2016.

⁵⁷ Aditya Bhat, "India, Vietnam boost defence ties; IAF to train Hanoi's Sukhoi Su-30 pilots," *International Business Times*, December 6, 2016; "India-Vietnam take defence ties to next level: should China worry?" *Financial Express*, December 6, 2016 and Panda, "Increasing Synergy In India-Vietnam Ties."

⁵⁸ Viet Anh, "French president to touch down in Vietnam," *VNExpress*, September 4, 2016.

⁵⁹ Socialist Republic of Vietnam, Ministry of National Defence, "French Defence Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian pays an official visit to Vietnam," *Bao Quoc Phong*, June 7, 2016;

provision of IT services to domestic and foreign markets. The two sides discussed cooperation in information and technology education, training courses in Japan and possible Japanese investment in the Military Software Park in Nha Trang.⁶⁰

On 22 November, Umeda Kunio, Japan's Ambassador to Vietnam, met with Deputy Minister of National Defence, Sr. Lt. General Nguyen Chi Vinh at the Ministry of National Defence. General Vinh sought cooperation from Japan in further exchange visits by military officers. Ambassador Kunio committed Japan to "increasing young officers exchange..."⁶¹

United States. During 2016 Vietnam hosted four delegations from the United States and sent VPA officers. In February, a delegation of course members from the U.S. Army's Advanced Strategic Leadership Studies Program made a study tour of Vietnam. The delegation was received by Senior Lt. General Vo Van Tuan, VPA Deputy Chief of the General Staff.⁶²

From March 17-19, the Commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, Admiral Scott Swift, and the Commander of the U.S. Marine Corps Forces Pacific, Lt. Gen. John Toolan, made a three-day joint visit to Vietnam. They held discussions with Rear Admiral Pham Hoai Nam, Commander of the VPA Navy. Admiral Swift held discussions with General Do Ba Ty, Chief of the VPA General Staff.⁶³ General Ty noted that the U.S. Navy provided training in defusing sea mines and bomb disposal. Admiral Swift noted that there is much room for cooperation between the two navies and that he would make an effort to ensure bilateral naval cooperation was more effective."⁶⁴

In April, VPA Navy officers visited U.S. Patrol Squadron 47 in Hawaii and inspected a P-3C Orion to understand its capability.⁶⁵

On October 26, Admiral Harry B. Harris, Commander of the U.S. Pacific Command, visited Hanoi for a working session with his counterpart. He met with Lt. General Phan Van Giang, Deputy Minister of National Defense and VPA Chief of the General Staff.⁶⁶

⁶⁰ In March, the Indian Ambassador to Vietnam and other embassy staff paid a working visit to the Signal Officers Training School in Nha Trang where Indian officers have been posted to the Information Technology and Foreign Languages Centre, under a defence cooperation agreement.

⁶¹ "Vietnam, Japan to boost defense cooperation," *People's Army Newspaper Online*, November 23, 2016.

⁶² "General welcomes US guests," *People's Army Newspaper Online*, February 23, 2016.

⁶³ Vietnam News Agency, "U.S. Navy and Marine Corps Commanders Visit Vietnam," VietNamNet Bridge, March 18, 2016.

⁶⁴ "Chief of General Staff receives US admiral," *People's Army Newspaper Online*, March 19, 2016.

⁶⁵ Boeing has suggested that one of its intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance suites would fit Vietnam's needs.

⁶⁶ "Chief of the General Staff receives US and Cambodian guests," *People's Army Newspaper Online*, October 27, 2016.

On November 18, David Shear, U.S. Principal Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, visited Hanoi and met with Deputy Minister of National Defence, Sr. Lt. General Nguyen Chi Vinh. Both Shear and Vinh agreed to expand cooperation in the fields of mutual interest such as addressing the aftermath of the war, delegation exchanges, education and training, UN peacekeeping operations, and search and rescue.”⁶⁷

India. In May 2016, a delegation from the Indian National Defence University visited their counterpart institution, the National Defence Academy, in Hanoi.

China. During 2016 Vietnam hosted three separate Border Policy delegations from China. In late July, the Border Guard Command of Ha Giang province and the Border Police in Yunnan province conducted a joint counter-terrorism exercise at the Thanh Thuy International Border Gate.⁶⁸ On October 31, a delegation from China’s Department of Border Guard Management, Ministry of Public Security was received in Ha Long by Quang Ninh province Border Guard Command. A cultural exchange program was held between the Quang Ninh province Border Guard and China’s Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Border Police Force.⁶⁹ On November 4, the border guard forces of Vietnam’s Quang Ninh province and China’s Dongxing city, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, carried out the first joint counter-terrorism exercise at Mong Cai international border gate. At the conclusions of this exercise both sides signed a MOU on future counter-terrorism exercises.⁷⁰

On September 19, a delegation from the Political Work Department of China’s Central Military Commission led by Major General Yin Hongwen held a working session with Office of the General Political Department (GPD) of the Vietnam People’s Army (VPA) in Hanoi. The two sides discussed “their working experiences, functions and tasks with the aim of providing efficient assistance to leadership in directing Party and political work in the army.”⁷¹ The visit was under the auspices of an Agreement on Party and Political Work Cooperation between the General Political Departments of the VPA and People’s Liberation Army (PLA). Sr. Lt. General Luong Cuong, the Director of the VPA’s GPD, received Maj. General Yin. General Yin noted that “visits of defense delegations at all levels, including defense leaders, commanders of military zones, services, corps and academies increased in recent years.”⁷²

⁶⁷ “Vietnam, US continue to boost defense cooperation,” *People’s Army Newspaper Online*, November 19, 2016

⁶⁸ Prashanth Parameswaran, “China, Vietnam Hold Joint Drills,” *The Diplomat*, July 30, 2016.

⁶⁹ “Young officers of Vietnamese, Chinese border forces hold exchange,” *People’s Army Newspaper Online*, November 1, 2016.

⁷⁰ Vietnam News Agency, “Vietnam, China hold counter-terrorism drill,” *People’s Army Newspaper Online*, November 5, 2016.

⁷¹ “General Luong Cuong receives Chinese defense delegation,” *People’s Army Newspaper Online*, September 20, 2016.

⁷² General Luong Cuong receives Chinese defense delegation.”

United Kingdom. From 5-7 September, a high-level Vietnamese defence delegation led by Deputy Minister of National Defence Senior Lt. General Nguyen Chi Vinh met with Minister of State Earl Howe to review progress in bilateral defence cooperation under the 2011 MOU. The two officials

noted that the current bilateral defense cooperation is not on a par with the potential of the two countries and the strategic partnership between Vietnam and the UK. The two sides agreed to study the possibilities to sign an agreement on defense cooperation vision [sic] with the aim of bolstering defense relations and cooperation toward efficiency and practical outcomes.⁷³

General Vinh told his host that Vietnam was willing to be a bridge between the UK and ASEAN.⁷⁴ Vinh suggested that the UK assist Vietnam in “overcoming the consequences of war” and

The two sides step up cooperation on UN peacekeeping missions, hydrograph[y] and defense industry as well as in sharing views on strategic issues via exchange of defense experts and researchers and a future mechanism of the Defense Policy Dialogue at the Deputy Defense Minister level.⁷⁵

General Vinh also called on Alok Sharma, Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Vinh and his delegation also visited the International Institute for Strategic Studies, Royal United Service Institute, and defence industry companies.

Junior Officer Exchanges. In January a delegation of staff and officer cadets from the Indian Naval Academy visited Vietnam.

From September 19-24, a delegation of junior VPA officers, led by Lt. Col. Nguyen Duc Cuong, Deputy Chief of the GPD’s Army Youth Committee, visited China as part of the young officer exchange program for 2016. The Vietnamese delegation visited the Beifang Corporation (Norinco), that produces weapons and equipment for the PLA, Guard Division 3 and the PLA Special Operations Academy.⁷⁶

On November 1, as part of the program of annual defence exchanges, a delegation of PLA junior officers met with their Vietnamese counterparts in Hanoi. The head of the PLA delegation, Colonel Ding Luochao, and his host, Colonel Dinh Quog Hung, briefed each other on youth activities in their respective armed forces. The PLA junior officers visited Regiment 143, Division 315 to share experiences on “the organization of youth and youth union activities in the army... and natural disaster prevention and relief...”⁷⁷

⁷³ Pham Tan, “Vietnam, UK to bolster defense cooperation on par with strategic partnership,” *People’s Army Newspaper Online*, September 8, 2016.

⁷⁴ “UK eyes stronger defence links with Vietnam,” *People’s Army Newspaper Online*, September 8, 2016.

⁷⁵ Pham Tan, “Vietnam, UK to bolster defense cooperation on par with strategic partnership” and “UK eyes stronger defence links with Vietnam.”

⁷⁶ Duc Cuong, “Vietnam, China hold young officer exchange 2016 program,” *People’s Army Newspaper Online*, September 21, 2016.

⁷⁷ “Chinese young officers visit Regiment 143,” *People’s Army Newspaper Online*, November 4, 2016 and “Active role of young officers in promoting Vietnam-China friendship,” *People’s Army Newspaper Online*, November 2, 2016.

Strategic Dialogue

In 2016 Vietnam hosted a defence dialogue with the United States and attended defence dialogues in China and France. Vietnam also used the occasion of the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore to confer with senior defence representatives from four major powers.

United States. On October 17, Cara Abercrombie, U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for South and Southeast Asia, visited Hanoi to attend the 7th Vietnam-US Defence Policy Dialogue with her counterpart Deputy Minister of National Defence, Sr. Lt. General Nguyen Chi Vinh. General Vinh told his guest “that Vietnam will support the U.S. and other partners to intervene in the region as long as it brings peace, stability and prosperity.”⁷⁸

China. On November 4, China hosted the 6th Vietnam-China Defense Strategic Dialogue in Chengdu, Sichuan province. Admiral Sun Jianguo, Deputy Chief of Jont Staff Department, Central Military Commission, and Senior Lt. General Nguyen Chi Vinh, Deputy Minister of National Defense co-hosted the dialogue. A review of activities conducted since last year’s strategic dialogue noted progress “in delegation exchanges, education-training and naval collaboration. The sides operated their hotline and exchanged experience in participating in UN peacekeeping missions. Their annual border defence friendship exchanges have been considered a highlight in joint activities.”⁷⁹

Admiral Sun and General Vinh “agreed to maintain the pace of and expand collaboration in a number of fields, including press exchanges, defence industry as well as teaching Chinese and Vietnamese.”⁸⁰ They also agreed to draw up a draft joint vision statement on defence cooperation and a protocol systematizing border defence friendship exchanges. Finally, Sun and Vinh encouraged China’s Academy of Military Sciences and Vietnam’s Institute of Military Strategy to carry out promptly a joint project “on collection of documents and memorabilia about the friendship between the two countries’ armies and the Ho Chi Minh=Mao Xedong ideology on solidarity during the resistance wars against France and the US.”⁸¹ Vinh made a courtesy call on Defence Minister Sr. Lt. General Chang Wanquan before returning to Hanoi.⁸²

France. From November 7-11, Deputy Defence Minister Sr. Lt. General Nguyen Chi Vinh led a high-ranking military delegation to France to attend the first Vietnam-France Defence Policy Dialogue at the invitation of Philippe Errera, Director-General of the

⁷⁸ Reuters, “Vietnam gives thumbs-up to U.S. regional role as pivot stumbles,” October 18, 2016.

⁷⁹ “VN, China hold 6th deputy ministerial-level defence strategic dialogue,” *People’s Army Newspaper Online*, November 5, 2016.

⁸⁰ “VN, China hold 6th deputy ministerial-level defence strategic dialogue.”

⁸¹ “VN, China hold 6th deputy ministerial-level defence strategic dialogue.”

⁸² Bao Trung, “Vietnam, China strive to boost defense cooperation,” *People’s Army Newspaper Online*, November 4, 2016.

General Department for Strategy and International Relations in the Ministry of Defence. The dialogue reflected “increasing political trust” and marked an “adjustment of bilateral defence cooperation” to achieve practical outcomes.⁸³ The two sides noted positive outcomes in bilateral defence cooperation including “personnel training, UN peacekeeping operations and maritime security” under a MOU signed in November 2009.⁸⁴

Errera and Vinh agreed

to increase exchange of delegations at all levels, enhance defence strategic dialogues; collaborate and support each other at multilateral defence and security mechanisms and forums; and strengthen cooperation on military medicine, training[,] defence industry, naval ship visits, UN peacekeeping operations as well as expand new cooperation areas such as maritime and aviation security and safety, and non-traditional security issues...⁸⁵

They also agreed to sign two documents, the Vietnam-France Joint Vision on Defence Cooperation and Agreement on Information Exchange and Secret [sic] Protection. At the conclusion of the dialogue Errera and Vinh witnessed the signing of two technical agreements on military medical cooperation and cooperation on UN peacekeeping operations. General Vinh and his delegation later visited Villacoublay Air Base and the War Academy.

Shangri-La Dialogue. Senior Vietnamese officers met with defence officials from Japan, China, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Japan. On June 3, Vo Van Tuan, Deputy Chief of the VPA General Staff met with Japanese defence officials on the sidelines of the 15th Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore.⁸⁶ On the same day Deputy Minister of National Defence Sr. Lt. General Nguyen Chi Vinh met with defence officials from China, the United Kingdom and the United States.

China. Sr. Lt. General Vinh met with Admiral Sun Jiaquo, China’s Deputy Chief of Staff of the Joint Staff Department of the Central Military Commission, for bilateral talks. Vinh suggested that the two countries organize strategic defence dialogues at the deputy ministerial level, and intensify coordination between their border, naval and maritime policy guard forces...⁸⁷ Vinh also extended an invitation for the China Coast Guard to

⁸³ “Vietnam, France strive for practical outcomes of defense cooperation,” *People’s Army Newspaper Online*, November 11, 2016.

⁸⁴ “Vietnam, France strive for practical outcomes of defense cooperation.”

⁸⁵ “Vietnam, France strive for practical outcomes of defense cooperation.”

⁸⁶ Vietnam News Agency, “Vietnam boosts bilateral dialogue to intensify regional security,” *People’s Army Newspaper Online*, June 6, 2016.

⁸⁷ Vietnam News Agency, “Vietnam boosts bilateral dialogue to intensify regional security,” *People’s Army Newspaper Online*, June 6, 2016.

join the Vietnam Coast Guard in conducting humanitarian rescue exercises in Vietnamese waters.⁸⁸

Admiral Sun said he hoped “the two countries can step up high-level exchanges, enhance strategic trust, boost cooperation in various sectors, including under the framework of the United Nations peacekeeping missions.”⁸⁹ Sun called for both sides to boost “exchange activities between the two countries’ border areas.”⁹⁰

United Kingdom. General Vinh, Deputy Minister of National Defence, met with the UK Secretary of State for Defence Michael Fallon on the sidelines of the 15th Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore.⁹¹ At their meeting Vinh told Fallon that Vietnam was willing to be a bridge between the UK and ASEAN and supported UK observer status at the annual ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting-Plus. Fallon told Vinh that the UK would invite Vietnam to take part in a UN peacekeeping seminar in September and would coordinate with Vietnam to build a field hospital in South Sudan. Further, Fallon stated that the MOD would arrange for VPA officers to attend training courses in the UK.

United States. General Vinh also met with David Shear, U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asia and Pacific Security Affairs, to discuss, among other things, regional security and war legacy issues. Vinh encouraged the U.S. to meet its commitments to assisting Vietnam’s participation in UN peacekeeping, detoxifying dioxin at Bien Hoa airport, and providing Vietnam with a map of unexploded ordnance left over from the Vietnam War. Shear reaffirmed U.S. support in dealing with war legacy issues and assisting Vietnam in training for UN peacekeeping.⁹²

Naval Port Visits, Naval Exercises and Coast Guard Capacity-Building

Port Visits. In 2016, the Vietnam People’s Navy participated in its first international fleet review. Vietnam hosted naval warships from Japan, France, India, the United States and China at the Cam Ranh International Port (CRIP), naval vessels from the Japan Coast Guard, U.S. Pacific Partnership and the U.S. Navy at Tien Sa port, Da Nang and the China Coast Guard at Hai Phong.

⁸⁸ Xinhua, “Chinese, Vietnamese Military Officials Hail Achievements in Cooperation,” Crienglish.com, June 3, 2016.

⁸⁹ Xinhua, “Chinese, Vietnamese Military Officials Hail Achievements in Cooperation,” Crienglish.com, June 3, 2016.

⁹⁰ Vietnam News Agency, “Vietnam boosts bilateral dialogue to intensify regional security.”

⁹¹ Vietnam News Agency, “Vietnam to deepen security-defence ties with EU, UK, Italy,” VietNamNet, June 6, 2016; Socialist Republic of Vietnam, Ministry of National Defence, “Vietnam to deepen security-defence ties with EU, UK, Italy,” *Bao Quoc Phong*, June 6, 2016; and Arthur Dominic Villasanta, “UK and Vietnam Strengthening Military Ties; are Considering a Mutual Defense Agreement,” *China Topix*, September 10, 2016.

⁹² Vietnam News Agency, “Vietnam boosts bilateral dialogues to intensify regional security,” *People’s Army Newspaper Online*, June 6, 2016.

Fleet Review. In February, Vietnam participated in its first International Fleet Review by dispatching HQ 011 *Dinh Tien Hoang*, a Gepard-class frigate, to India to participate in Vietnam's first International Fleet Review.

Japan. In April, two JMSDF guided missile destroyers, *JS Ariake* and *JS Setogiri*, paid a four-day port visit to the CRIP. In July, the Japanese Coast Guard ship *Kojima* visited Da Nang for five days.⁹³

France. From May 2-6, 2016, the French naval ship *Tonnerre* called in at CRIP, Khanh Hoa province. Press reports noted that this goodwill visit was in advance of the scheduled visits by France's Defence Minister and President.⁹⁴

India. In late May and early June, two Indian warships, *INS Satpura* and *INS Kirch* made a four-day visit to CRIP.

Pacific Partnership. From 15-18 July, the USNS *Mercy* (T-AH 19) took part in the U.S. Pacific Partnership 2016 program at Tien Sa port, Da Nang along with the VPA Navy hospital ship *Khanh Hoa* (HQ 01) and the the JMSDF *Shimokita* (LST-4002).⁹⁵ A Royal Navy (RN) dental clinical team participated in the Pacific Partnership program for the first time. The RN dental team played a leading role in a two-day multinational dental summit and delivered dental treatment and preventive care to the local community.⁹⁶

United States. From 28 September-1 October, the *USS John S. McCain* (DDG 56), and personnel from Destroyer Squadron 7 and Commander Task Force 73, made a four-day visit to Tien Sa port, Da Nang. During the visit the two sides held discussions on pre-deployment preparations, subject-matters experts on navigation, damage control, symposia on military medical and maritime law, the Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea (CUES) and search and rescue.⁹⁷

After leaving Da Nang the *USS John S. McCain* and *USS Frank Cable* (a submarine tender) made an inaugural visit to CRIP from 2-4 October.⁹⁸

China. In October (22nd-26th), three PLAN warships (*Xiang Tan*, *Zhou Shan* and *Chao Hu*) from the 23rd Naval Escort Task Force made a five-day goodwill visit to Cam Ranh

⁹³ Nguyen Dong, "US warship set to revisit Vietnam this month," *VNExpress*, September 27, 2016.

⁹⁴ Thuy Dung, "French warship to visit Cam Ranh port," *People's Army Newspaper Online*, April 29, 2016;

⁹⁵ "UK Royal Navy Dental Medical Services personnel in Vietnam as part of Pacific Partnership 2016," British Embassy Hanoi, July 20, 2016.

⁹⁶ "UK Royal Navy Dental Medical Services personnel in Vietnam as part of Pacific Partnership 2016," British Embassy Hanoi, July 20, 2016.

⁹⁷ Nguyen Dong, "US warship set to revisit Vietnam this month," *VNExpress*, September 27, 2016; Erik Slavin, "US, Vietnam navies work on preventing South China Sea incidents," *Stars & Stripes*, September 27, 2016; Vietnam News Agency, "US naval ship visits Da Nang," *VietNamNet*, September 28, 2016; "US, Vietnam navies joint 7th annual naval engagement in Da Nang," *Tuoi Tre*, September 29, 2016.

⁹⁸ John Boudreau, "U.S. Warships Make First Visit to Vietnam Base in Decades," Bloomberg News, October 4, 2016 and Jesse Johnson, "U.S. warships make landmark visit to Vietnam's strategic Cam Ranh Bay," *The Japan Times*, October 5, 2016.

International Port after completing their deployment to the Gulf of Aden. This was the first visit by Chinese naval ships to CRIP and was a result of Defence Minister Lich's visit to China in August.⁹⁹

On November 10, a Chinese maritime law enforcement ship, made a friendly four-day port visit to Chua Ve port, Hai Phong. The Chinese visitors held talks with the Vietnam Coast Guard Region 1 Command, and participated in friendly spots with their counterparts¹⁰⁰

Naval Exercises. In 2016, the Vietnam People's Navy conducted search and rescue (SAR) exercises and Code of Unplanned Encounters at Sea (CUES) exercises with Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Force, the Indian Navy and the U.S. Navy.

Japan. From February 16-18, a JMSDF team and two P-3C maritime patrol aircraft flew to Da Nang to take part in a series of exercises with the VPA Navy. On the final day the two sides conducted a SAR map exercise at an onshore facility based on simulated cooperation between the P-3C planes and Vietnamese naval vessels assisting a ship in distress.¹⁰¹ In February, the JMSDF conducted joint drills with the Vietnam People's Navy both ashore and at sea.

In April, two JMSDF guided missile destroyers, *JS Ariake* and *JS Setogiri*, conducted a SAR) and CUES exercises with the Vietnam People's Navy after visiting CRIP.

India. In October the Indian Coast Guard visited Vietnam and conducted SAR exercises with the Vietnam Coast Guard.¹⁰²

United States. On 1 October, after leaving Da Nang, the *USS John S. McCain* participated in the seventh Vietnam-U.S. Naval Engagement Activity with a ship from the Vietnam People's Navy involving CUES and SAR exercises.

Joint Patrols. From April 20-23, Vietnam Coast Guard and China Coast Guard conducted their eleventh annual joint fishery patrol in the Gulf of Tonkin.¹⁰³ According to press accounts this joint patrol was "the longest in terms of time and distance since the first joint patrol of the kind was launched in 2006."¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ "Chinese naval ships visit Cam Ranh International Port," *People's Army Newspaper Online*, October 23, 2016 and Vietnam News Agency, "Khanh Hoa welcomes Chinese naval ships," *People's Army Newspaper Online*, October 25, 2016.

¹⁰⁰ "Chinese ship visits Hai Phong," *People's Army Newspaper Online*, November 11, 2016.

¹⁰¹ Associated Press, "Japan's maritime force conducts joint drills with Vietnam's navy in South China Sea base."

¹⁰² Tran Tuan, "Vietnam high-ranking military delegation visits India," *People's Army Newspaper Online*, December 6, 2016.

¹⁰³ My Hanh, "Chinese forcers should treat Vietnamese fishermen humanely: Vietnamese Coast Guard officer," *People's Army News Paper Online*, April 21, 2016. A later report stated it was the tenth joint patrol; see: "VN Coast Guard's largest vessel joint point patrol with China," *VietNamNet Bridge*, April 23, 2016.

¹⁰⁴ "Vietnam-China joint fishery patrol concludes," *People's Army Newspaper Online*, April 24, 2016;

On November 9, coast guard forces from China's Nanhai Division and Vietnam's Coast Guard Region 1 Command concluded a three-day joint fishery drill in the Gulf of Tonkin. During the exercise the two sides checked the licenses of fishing trawlers and their equipment, explained laws and regulations related to the joint fishing area, conducted a joint search and rescue drill, and exchanged onboard ship visits.¹⁰⁵

Coast Guard Capacity Building. In 2016, Vietnam received assistance in capacity building for its Coast Guard from Japan and the United States.

Japan. In May, Japan's Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida met his counterpart Pham Binh Minh in Hanoi. Vietnam requested Japan to provide new vessels to strengthen its Coast Guard. In July, the president of the Japan's House of Representatives Committee on Security, Eto Akinori, met his counterpart, Nguyen Kim Khoa, chairman of the National Assembly's Committee for Defence and Security, to discuss the legal aspects of Japanese assistance to build up the capacity of the Vietnam Coast Guard.

In September, Prime Ministers Shinzo Abe and Nguyen Xuan Phuc met on the sidelines of the ASEAN summit in Vientiane. Abe told Phuc that Japan was ready to provide two new large patrol boats for the Vietnam Coast Guard to strengthen its maritime law enforcement capabilities. The new patrol boats would be financed by a low-interest loan under Japan's Overseas Development Assistance program.

As noted above, on 22 November Ambassador Umeda Kunio met with Deputy Minister of National Defence, Sr. Lt. General Nguyen Chi Vinh at the Ministry of National Defence. Ambassador Kunio committed Japan to assist Vietnam in "maritime law enforcement..."¹⁰⁶

United States. On October 28 Admiral Harris and Major General Bui Trung Dung, Deputy Commander of the Vietnam Coast Guard, presided over the inauguration of a maintenance boat haul-out facility in Quang Nam developed with U.S. support.¹⁰⁷ Admiral Harris was accompanied by the U.S. Consul General and the Director of Operations, Readiness and Exercises, U.S. Defense Threat Reduction Agency.

National Defence Industry Cooperation

In 2016, Vietnam hosted discussions on national defence industry cooperation with delegations from the United States, India and France. Vietnam also explored defence industry cooperation with the United Kingdom.

United States. In March, Michael Michalak, Senior Vice President of the US-ASEAN Business Council visited Hanoi and met with Sr. Lt. General Nguyen Chi Vinh, Deputy

¹⁰⁵ "Vietnam-China coast guards wrap up this year's 2nd joint fishery patrol," *People's Army Newspaper Online*, November 10, 2016.

¹⁰⁶ "Vietnam, Japan to boost defense cooperation," *People's Army Newspaper Online*, November 23, 2016.

¹⁰⁷ Phuong Linh, "Vietnam Coast Guard boat maintenance facility inaugurated in Quang Nam," *People's Army Newspaper Online*, October 28, 2016.

Minister of National Defence. Michalak informed General Vinh that a U.S. business delegation would visit Vietnam “to explore possibilities for cooperation with Vietnamese defence industries.” General Vinh noted that “cooperation in defence industry has not matched the two countries’ potential” and “Vietnam wants the US to provide modern technologies in accordance with Vietnam’s reality to produce amphibious [sic] products, considering it a firm step to boost bilateral defence cooperation.”¹⁰⁸

In June it was revealed that BAE Systems was assessing potential opportunities in Vietnam’s defence industry and homeland security markets. According to Nick Glover, the Southeast Asia vice president of BAE Systems, “Vietnam could be an interesting market. We have been assessing industrial capability within the country and we are looking at potential opportunities. It could be a market where we look to enter through Applied Intelligence [BAE Systems’ cyber security division’ or our HADR [Humanitarian Assistance, Disaster Relief] products. BAE Systems Inc. is a U.S. subsidiary and could take advantage of the U.S. Foreign Military Sales program to meet Vietnam’s procurement needs.”¹⁰⁹

India. In June, on the sidelines the visit by India’s defence minister, representatives of Indian and Vietnamese defence industries met to map out future areas of investment and cooperation. The Indian media carried reports at this time that India was advancing plans to sell the BrahMos cruise missile to Vietnam.¹¹⁰

In December, the Indian and Vietnamese defence ministers met, and with respect to Prime Minister’s Modi’s announcement of a \$500 million Line of Credit to assist Vietnam in cooperation in national defence industry, “agreed on implementation methods and tasked relevant agencies of the two sides to quickly finalize necessary and procedures, suitable with Vietnam’s needs and within the framework of the signed documents.”¹¹¹

On 7 December, on the sidelines of Defence Minister’s Lich visit to India, a roundtable conference was held between representatives of Indian businessmen and Vietnamese defence industry. This meeting was hosted by Major General Ngo Van Giao, Deputy Director of the General Department of Defence Industry under the Ministry of National

¹⁰⁸ “Vietnam and the US to promote defence cooperation,” *People’s Army Newspaper Online*, March 17, 2016.

¹⁰⁹ Jon Grevatt, “BAE Systems sets sights on Vietnam.” *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, June 8, 2016.

¹¹⁰ “India Set to Discuss sale of BrahMos to Vietnam,” *Times of India*, June 3, 2016; “Countering China? India Plans to Accelerate BrahMos sale to Vietnam, report says,” *India TV News*, June 9, 2016; Reuters, New Delhi, “Delhi in missile push,” *The Australian Financial Review*, June 10, 2016 and Jon Grevatt, “India plans expanded export of BrahMos cruise missiles,” *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, June 15, 2016.

¹¹¹ Tran Tuan, “Vietnam high-ranking military delegation visits India.”

Defence and Major General Nguyen Manh Hung of Viettel (Vietnam Telecommunication Group).¹¹²

France. On August 21, Nicolas Dmitrieff, Chairman of France's Constructions Industrielles de la Méditerranée (CNIM) group, visited Hanoi for discussions on defence industry cooperation. Dmitrieff met with Lt. General Phan Van Giang, Chief of the VPA General Staff. General Giang "suggested both sides actively learn about each other's cooperation demands in the field of defence industry, focusing on products that serve defensive purposes and socio-economic development as well."¹¹³

On November 23, a forum to promote defence industry cooperation between Vietnam and France was held in Hanoi co-sponsored by Ministry of National Defence's General Department of Defense Industry (GDDI) and the French Ministry of Defence's General Directorate for Armament (GDA). Vietnam was represented by Major General Doan Hung Minh, Deputy Director of GDDI and France was represented by Lt. General J. Cousquer, Director for Asia, America and Africa, DGA.¹¹⁴

General Minh said that, "Vietnam will give priority to boosting bilateral cooperation with France, especially in technology transfer, weapons and equipment production and repairs for national defence, human resources training, and management experience exchange on defence industry."¹¹⁵ General Cousquer noted that "France is willing to support and share experiences with Vietnam in the defence-security, including issues related to global security, defence industry and marine security."¹¹⁶

United Kingdom. As noted above, from 5-7 September, a high-level Vietnamese defence delegation led by Deputy Minister of National Defence Senior Lt. General Nguyen Chi Vinh met with Minister of State Earl Howe. General Vinh suggested that Vietnam and the UK step up cooperation in defence industry. General Vinh also met separately with representatives of British defence industry companies.¹¹⁷

Peacekeeping Operations/Military Medicine

Peacekeeping Operations. In 2016, Vietnam held discussions on exchanging experiences and cooperation in UN Peacekeeping Operations with Japan, India, China, the United Kingdom and France.

¹¹² Tran Tuan, "General Ngo Xuan Lich's official visit to India wraps up successfully," *People's Army Newspaper Online*, December 8, 2016.

¹¹³ Socialist Republic of Vietnam, Ministry of National Defence, "Chief of General Staff receives Chairman of France's CNIM Group," *Bao Quoc Phong*, August 24, 2016;

¹¹⁴ "Vietnam, France hold bilateral defense business forum in Hanoi," *People's Army Newspaper Online*, November 24, 2016.

¹¹⁵ "Vietnam, France hold bilateral defense business forum in Hanoi."

¹¹⁶ "Vietnam, France hold bilateral defense business forum in Hanoi."

¹¹⁷ Pham Tan, "Vietnam, UK to bolster defense cooperation on par with strategic partnership" and "UK eyes stronger defence links with Vietnam."

Japan. In January 2016, Vietnam hosted the Third Vietnam-Japan Dialogue of Infantry Staff Officers. At this meeting it was agreed to cooperate in UN peacekeeping operations (see military medicine below).

India. In March, Vietnam and India, as co-chairs of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM)-Plus Experts' Working Group on Humanitarian Mine Action, hosted the Peacekeeping Operations and Humanitarian Mine Action Field Training Exercise in India. After the June visit by India's defence minister Parrikar, the Indian and Vietnam Peacekeeping Centers signed a cooperation program.¹¹⁸

China. In March, the Chinese and Vietnamese defence ministers signed a MOU on cooperation in UN peacekeeping operations.

United Kingdom. From 5-7 September, a high-level Vietnamese defence delegation, led by Deputy Minister of National Defence Senior Lt. General Nguyen Chi Vinh, visited Britain to attend the Summit on UN Peacekeeping Missions hosted by the UK Ministry of Defence. As noted above, General Vinh met with Minister of State Earl Howe and suggested that, "The two sides step up cooperation on UN peacekeeping missions..."¹¹⁹

France. From 26-27 October, a VPA delegation led by Senior Lt. General Vo Van Tuan, Deputy Chief of the General Staff and Deputy Head of the Ministry of National Defence's Steering Committee for Peacekeeping, attended the Ministerial Conference on Peacekeeping in the Francophone area in Paris. This conference was attended by representatives from fifty-six countries and organisations.¹²⁰

On 10 November, France and Vietnam signed a technical agreement on defense cooperation in UN peacekeeping operations. A month later, on 7 December, the Vietnam Peacekeeping Center, in collaboration with the French Embassy, organised a workshop to exchange experiences on the deployment of engineers for UN peacekeeping missions.¹²¹ Vietnam is presently equipping and training an engineering company to take part in UN peacekeeping missions in the future.

After the workshop Sr. Lt. General Vo Van Tuan, Deputy Chief of the General Staff and head of the steering committee overseeing Vietnam's preparation for UN peacekeeping, received the French Chargé d'affaires and French peacekeeping experts. General Tuan expressed his wish that France "would offer more in-depth sharing with

¹¹⁸ Tran Tuan, "Vietnam high-ranking military delegation visits India," *People's Army Newspaper Online*, December 6, 2016.

¹¹⁹ Pham Tan, "Vietnam, UK to bolster defense cooperation on par with strategic partnership" and "UK eyes stronger defence links with Vietnam."

¹²⁰ Vietnam News Agency, "Vietnam attends peacekeeping conference in France," *People's Army Newspaper Online*, October 28, 2016.

¹²¹ Vietnam News Agency, "Vietnam, France discuss experience on UN peacekeeping activities," *People's Army Newspaper Online*, December 7, 2016.

Vietnamese peacekeepers and enhance training cooperation with the Vietnamese peacekeeping force, including French language training.”¹²²

Military Medicine. In 2016, Vietnam received military medical delegations from Japan, the United States, France and China. Vietnam and Russia also reviewed the operations of their joint Tropical Center.

Japan. In January 2016, at the Third Vietnam-Japan Dialogue of Infantry Staff Officers thead of the Japanese delegation, Major General Katsuki Takada, held a working session with the staff of Military Hospital 175 to discuss Japanese medial assistance to Vietnamese personnel preparing to deploy a level-2 field hospital to the UN Mission in the Republic of South Sudan.

As noted above, on 22 November, Am,bassador Umeda Kunio met with Deputy Minister of National Defence, Sr. Lt. General Nguyen Chi Vinh at the Ministry of National Defence. General Vinh sought Japan’s cooperation in mine action. Ambassador Kunio promised that Japan would assist Vietnam in “UN peacekeeping operations...”¹²³

United States. On 14 April, the U.S. Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City and Military Hospital 175 co-hosted a workshop on development trends in international hospitals. The workshop was attended by forty delegates from the United States representing leading hospitals, pharmaceutical and medical equipment companies, medical institutes and training establishments. The workshop identified the following areas for future cooperation: scientific research, training, medical practice and equipment delivery.¹²⁴

On October 27, Admiral Harris visited Military Hospital 175 in Ho Chi Minh City that is involved in preparing for the deployment of a level-2 hospital for peacekeeping with the United Nations Mission in South Sudan. Harris noted that Vietnam was one of a few countries that the U.S. cooperates with in military medicine.¹²⁵

France. On 15-16 September, two French medical doctors with experience in UN peacekeeping joined members of the Vietnam Peacekeeping Centre at Military Hospital 175 to discuss Vietnam’s forthcoming deployment of a level-two field hospital to the United Nations Mission in the South Sudan.¹²⁶

China. In early November, a delegation of Chinese peacekeeping experts, led by Senior Colonel Nanning, Deputy Chief of the Ministry of Defence’s Peacekeeping Office, visited Vietnam as part of the MOU on Peacekeeping signed in April 2015. The visiting

¹²² “Deputy Chief of General Staff receives guests,” *People’s Army Newspaper Online*, December 9, 2016.

¹²³ “Vietnam, Japan to boost defense cooperation,” *People’s Army Newspaper Online*, November 23, 2016.

¹²⁴ “Vietnam and US develop international hospitals,” *People’s Army Newspaper Online*, April 15, 2016.

¹²⁵ “US Pacific Command visit Military Hospital 175,” *People’s Army Newspaper Online*, October 28, 2016.

¹²⁶ “French experts share peacekeeping experience with Vietnam,” *People’s Army Newspaper Online*, September 17, 2016.

delegation was received by Senior Lt. General Vo Van Tuan, Deputy Chief of the VPA General Staff.¹²⁷

Vietnam-Russia Tropical Center. The Joint Committee of the Vietnam-Russia Tropical Center met in Vietnam on 16 November and held its annual meeting on 8 December at the Ministry of National Defence in Hanoi under the co-chairmanship of Senior Lt. General Nguyen Chi Vinh, Deputy Minister of National Defence, and Academician Pavlov Dmitry. This meeting discussed the report by the Directorate of the Tropical Center “on the outcomes of the scientific and technological activities in 2016 and the action plans for 2017, focusing on tropical ecology, endurance and biomedicine as well as personnel training.”¹²⁸ At this meeting General Vinh suggested that the Vietnam and Russian sub-committees prepare a protocol and revised agreement for future activities in order to “actively improve the efficiency of scientific research and expansion of international cooperation.”¹²⁹

After the meeting Pavlov Dmitry met with Minister of National Defence General Ngo Xuan Lich. Lich expressed his appreciation of the work of the Joint Committee especially “in scientific, technological and training activities and the proposals of extending the agreement on the Vietnam-Russian Tropical Center.”¹³⁰ The twenty-eighth session of the Joint Committee is scheduled for Moscow in May 2017.

Arms Sales and Deliveries

In 2016 India and Vietnam signed a contract for the purchase of Ocean Patrol Vessels, discussed how to implement India’s offer of a new line of credit for defence purchases and future weapons sales. Vietnam received its fifth enhanced Kilo-class submarine while Russia proceeded with the construction of frigates and at sixth Kilo-class submarine. Vietnam and Russia discussed future arms procurements and co-production. Vietnam and Japan discussed the possible sale of maritime patrol aircraft.

India. India is fast emerging as one of Vietnam’s major defence industry partners. In 2016 it was reported that India was currently upgrading Vietnam’s *Petya*-class light frigates for anti-submarine warfare and also was expanding its existing service program to upgrade all existing Vietnamese stocks of Soviet-era military equipment, including thermal sights and fire control systems for armoured vehicles, T-54 and T-55 tanks, and M-17/MI-8 helicopters.

It was reported that India has offered to sell Light Combat Helicopters and heavyweight torpedoes to Vietnam and the two sides are continuing to discuss the sale of the BrahMos cruise missile.

¹²⁷ “Vietnam, China boost cooperation in peacekeeping operations,” *People’s Army Newspaper Online*, November 4, 2016.

¹²⁸ “Defense Minister received Russian guests,” *People’s Army Newspaper Online*, December 9, 2016.

¹²⁹ “Defense Minister received Russian guests.”

¹³⁰ “Defense Minister received Russian guests.”

After the visit by India's defence minister to Vietnam in June 2016, the Vietnam Border Guard and the India's Larsen & Toubro Company reached an in principle agreement for the construction and delivery of high speed patrol vessels funded under the terms of a \$100 million Line of Credit offered by India.¹³¹

The Indian and Vietnamese defence secretaries are scheduled to meet in early 2017 to identify military projects and equipment to be procured by Vietnam under the \$500 million Line of Credit extended by Prime Minister Modi.¹³²

In September, Prime Minister Modi offered Vietnam a \$500 million Line of Credit for unspecified defence purchases and \$5 million to set up a military information technology software park in Nha Trang.

Russia. In February 2016, Vietnam took delivery of its fifth *Varshavyanka* or enhanced Kilo-class conventional submarine, HQ 186 *Da Nang*. In April and May, Russia's Zelenodolsk Shipyard launched two Gepard 3.9 (Project 11661E) frigates configured for anti-submarine warfare. In June, Russia launched the sixth and final submarine in this order, HQ 187 *Ba Ria-Vung Tau*; HQ 187 underwent sea trials in September. The sixth submarine and the frigates are expected to be delivered before the end of 2016 or in early 2017.

During 2016 the following developments in military cooperation were reported:

- Russia informed Vietnam it was willing to sell Klub-A 3M-54AE air-launched anti-ship missiles.
- Vietnam began the production of the KCT 15 anti-surface warfare missile as a result of technology transfer from Russia.
- In August, Russian media sources reported that Russia was rebuilding an airfield at Cam Ranh Bay.
- It was reported that Vietnam had expressed an interest in procuring Russia's T-90 battle tank.
- In October it was reported that Vietnam entered into negotiations with the Siberian Aeronautical Research Institute to modernize its fleet of An-2 military transport aircraft.

Japan. In June, Japanese media reported that Vietnam's navy informally inquired about the possibility of procuring secondhand Maritime Self-Defense Force P-3C anti-submarine patrol aircraft.¹³³

¹³¹ Tran Tuan, "Vietnam high-ranking military delegation visits India," *People's Army Newspaper Online*, December 6, 2016.

¹³² Panda, "Increasing Synergy In India-Vietnam Ties."

¹³³ Atsushi Tomiyama, "Vietnam eyes secondhand Japanese defense gear," *Nikkei Asian Review*, June 26, 2016.

Professional Military Education and Training

In 2016, the United States, India, United Kingdom and Japan all offered professional military education and training courses for Vietnam, including English-language instruction, international maritime law, basic submarine course and vocational training.

United States. In late January 2016 more than seventy VPA officers graduated from four English language courses sponsored by the U.S. Department of Defense. The course was conducted at the Ministry of National Defence's Foreign Language Training Centre 971 in Hanoi.¹³⁴

India. In 2016 India offered to train up to fifty Vietnamese defence personnel under the India Technical Economic Cooperation Program. India has already trained 550 submariners over the past three years.¹³⁵ In September, twenty Vietnamese officers and forty submariners completed the six-month basic submarine course at INS *Satavahana* in India.

United Kingdom. From 9-13 May, the UK Ministry of Defence, in cooperation with Vietnam's Ministry of National Defence, organized a training course on law enforcement in the Exclusive Economic Zone law in Da Nang for naval officers from Vietnam, Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand. Course members were introduced to "maritime international law... regional and global threats; maritime safety systems; search and rescue missions; maritime environmental issues; and disaster management."¹³⁶

In May, eighteen VPA officers completed a nine-month English-language course conducted by the British Council in Ho Chi Minh City sponsored by the UK Ministry of Defence. The course commenced in September 2015. Over the last five years 153 VPA officers and defence personnel completed English-language training. Some of the graduates will be selected to take military courses in the UK or in other English-speaking countries, others are expected to take part in UN peacekeeping training in Vietnam.¹³⁷

Japan. In May, fifty-one trainees from the Vocational Training and Manpower Export Company, under the Defence Economic Technical Industry Corporation of the General Department of Defense Industry completed the first five-month construction training course with Japan's Mukai Corporation.

¹³⁴ Embassy of the United States, Hanoi, "U.S. Department of Defense Sponsors English Language Training for Vietnamese Military Officers," January 28, 2016.

¹³⁵ Panda, "Increasing Synergy In India-Vietnam Ties."

¹³⁶ "UK holds first-ever military training course in Vietnam for regional officers," *People's Army Newspaper Online*, May 13, 2016.

¹³⁷ "More Vietnamese officers complete English training course," *People's Army Newspaper Online*, May 25, 2016.

As noted above, on 22 November Ambassador Umeda Kunio met with Deputy Minister of National Defence, Sr. Lt. General Nguyen Chi Vinh at the Ministry of National Defence. General Vinh sought cooperation from Japan in “education and training.”¹³⁸

War Legacy Issues

In 2016, the United States and Vietnam entered the second phase of their dioxin mitigation program; Vietnam call for further U.S. support. Vietnam also called on the United Kingdom and Japan to assist in dealing with war legacy issues.

United States. On 18 October, the U.S. and Vietnam commenced the second phase of dioxin removal in Da Nang. The first phase was completed in May and the second phase is expected to conclude in mid-2017. Later that month Dinh The Huynh, the standing member of the VCP Central Committee’s Secretariat visited Washington at the invitation of Secretary of State John Kerry.¹³⁹ Huynh called for prioritising the settlement of war consequences and humanitarian aid.”¹⁴⁰

United Kingdom. As noted above, from 5-7 September, a high-level Vietnamese defence delegation led by Deputy Minister of National Defence Senior Lt. General Nguyen Chi Vinh met with Minister of State Earl Howe. General Vinh suggested that the UK assist Vietnam in “overcoming the consequences of war.”¹⁴¹

Japan. As noted above, on 22 November, Ambassador Umeda Kunio met with Deputy Minister of National Defence, Sr. Lt. General Nguyen Chi Vinh at the Ministry of National Defence. General Vinh sought cooperation from Japan in the “treatment of dioxin-affected areas.”¹⁴²

Conclusion

Vietnam has sought to avoid being caught in the middle of strategic rivalry between a rising China and the United States by pursuing a multi-polar balance among seven major powers – Russia, India, Japan, China, the United States, United Kingdom and France. The purpose of strategic partnerships is to give each country equity in Vietnam to prevent Vietnam from being pulled into a rival’s orbit and to enable Vietnam to maintain its strategic autonomy. The paper briefly examined Vietnam’s strategic partnerships with the major powers after the 12th National Party Congress in January 2016.

¹³⁸ “Vietnam, Japan to boost defense cooperation,” *People’s Army Newspaper Online*, November 23, 2016.

¹³⁹ Carlyle A. Thayer, “Vietnam-US Relations: The Duterte Factor,” Thayer Consultancy Background Brief, October 30, 2016.

¹⁴⁰ “Relations with CPV critical to boosting US-Vietnam ties: John Kerry,” VietnamNet, October 26, 2016.

¹⁴¹ Pham Tan, “Vietnam, UK to bolster defense cooperation on par with strategic partnership” and “UK eyes stronger defence links with Vietnam.”

¹⁴² “Vietnam, Japan to boost defense cooperation,” *People’s Army Newspaper Online*, November 23, 2016.

This paper discussed the exchange of high-level visits, strategic dialogue, defence cooperation agreements (equipment procurement, military technology, education and training, military medicine and maritime security), naval port visits and engagement activities, and national defence industry cooperation. This paper concludes that Vietnam seeks to use international defence cooperation to give each strategic partner equity in Vietnam's stability and development in order to ensure Vietnam's non-alignment and strategic autonomy.

When taken as a whole, Vietnam's web of strategic and comprehensive partnerships serves to insulate Vietnam from Sino-US competition and provide Vietnam with the means to maneuver among the major powers in order to protect its independence and self-reliance.