

## STRATEGIC ADJUSTMENT OF RUSSIA, THE UNITED STATES, CHINA AND VIETNAM'S RESPONSE

**Pham Thi Yen**

Van Hien University, HCMC, Vietnam

### ABSTRACT

This article aims to assess the strategic shifts of Russia, the US, and China since the early 21st century and analyze Vietnam's corresponding responses. Utilizing two established methodologies in international relations research—policy analysis and historical research—the author seeks to provide clarity on the subject. The policy analysis method aids in understanding a nation's motives, interests, and actions by examining its implemented policies, while the historical research method offers a comprehensive view by organizing events and data chronologically and spatially. Findings suggest that Russia, influenced by events like the Ukraine conflict, has strengthened ties with China, while China and the US have adopted more adaptable strategies to extend their global influence. These adjustments, with a shared focus on the Asia-Pacific region, hold implications for Southeast Asian countries, particularly Vietnam. Amidst global complexities, Vietnam maintains its commitment to independent foreign policy, pursuing a "dynamic balance" with major powers. The article concludes that due to strategic interest conflicts, competition among these nations will persist, prompting Vietnam to maintain a balanced diplomatic approach, even if it involves navigating delicate relationships—a metaphorical "tightrope" of equilibrium amidst uncertainty.

**Keywords:** Strategic adjustment, US-Russia-China relations, great-power relations, Vietnam - major country relations, balancing policy

### INTRODUCTION

In the history of international relations, major powers play an exceedingly significant role, capable of influencing or shaping the power structure among entities. Therefore, examining the foreign strategies of major countries, especially the US, Russia, China - the three leading world powers in terms of economy and defense, is always a priority for many nations. After China gained its position as the world's 2nd largest economy (2010), the foreign outlooks of major powers underwent significant adjustments. While China is no longer able to "hide its strength" and has proactively asserted its position and increased global influence, pursuing the "Chinese dream" and vigorously promoting national rejuvenation; the US has also reinforced its position, increasing its presence in the Asia-Pacific region to counterbalance China's power. As for Russia, due to its history of confrontation with Western countries, it has a closer bond with China. The dynamic development of the Asia - Pacific region, propelled by the increasing presence of major powers, has bolstered the role of ASEAN across multiple dimensions, concurrently providing opportunities for Vietnam to pursue a foreign policy orientation of "multilateralization and diversification", enhancing the nation's resilience in ensuring security. However, strategic competition among great powers, notably between the US and China, exhibits unpredictable developments in both magnitude and form, potentially posing numerous challenges to the implementation of foreign policies by smaller and medium-sized countries, including Vietnam, particularly in the dynamic balancing act among fiercely competing major powers. From the perspective of power balance theory, this article aims to elucidate the motivations and manifestations of policy adjustments by

major countries - China, the US, and Russia - thereby analyzing the opportunities and challenges posed by these adjustments for Vietnam. Additionally, it aims to clarify the policies Vietnam selects in managing relations with major powers.

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on the triangular relationship between the United States, Russia, and China, and its impact on Vietnam, has been addressed in several valuable works, both internationally and within Vietnam. Elizabeth Wishnick (2009), in her monograph "Russia, China, and the United States in Central Asia: Prospects for great power competition and cooperation in the shadow of the Georgian crisis", offers a critical perspective on the Sino-Russian partnership, highlighting differences between the two powers in their energy policies and economic integration in Central Asia, despite both having shared interests in maintaining regime security and limiting U.S. influence in the region. Alexander Korolev (2018) elucidates Russia's approach to the South China Sea disputes but with connections to the US, China and Vietnam. In the article "Russia in the South China Sea: Balancing and Hedging", the author argues that Russia's ambiguous stance on the disputes, manifested in its support for both China and Vietnam, reflects two distinct behaviors of major powers, occurring at different levels but intersecting in the South China Sea. On the one hand, Russia seeks to balance the system, aiming to check and prevent the strongest power within the system - the United States. On the other hand, it maintains a posture of hedging, avoiding alignment with either side and causing clear harm to the other to ensure its interests (both China and Vietnam are important partners for Russia's defense industry).

Artyom Lukin (2021) in the paper "The Russia-US-China Strategic Triangle in the Asia-Pacific" within the book "Trump's America and International Relations in the Indo-Pacific - Theoretical Analysis of Changes & Continuities" implied that the increasing cooperation between Russia and China in East Asia would push the United States out of the political landscape of the region (Artyom L., 2021, p.2), and that the consolidation of the Russia-China axis is a result of the dual containment policy - both towards Russia and China - by the United States (Artyom L., 2021, p.115). Meanwhile, Irina Minakova and colleagues (2021) in their article "The USA, Russia and China as a Center of Influence in Global Economy" argue that the United States, China, and Russia are three countries currently shaping the agenda of global diplomacy. The peaceful coexistence of these nations is a pressing necessity for the present era. The authors cite that the United States, China, and Russia are passengers on the same boat, where there is no room for overly selfish demands or excessive ambitions. Therefore, it is imperative to continue the policy of dialogue development and expand interactions in the form of the trilateral US-Russia-China framework (Irina Minakova et al, 2021, p.7). Stephanie Pezard (2022) delves further into the U.S.-Russia relationship in her work "U.S. Strategic Competition with Russia". She presents several key conclusions: (i) U.S.-Russia competition is likely to persist, (ii) countries situated "in between" Russia and NATO will be at the epicenter of this competition, (iii) The United States currently holds an advantage but may risk losing it due to misguided policies, and (iv) The United States can assist allies and partners in addressing gray zone threats, but it is ultimately these allies and partners who will aid the United States in prevailing in the competition (Stephanie P., 2022, p.2).

The symposium "The New Normal of Great Power Competition: The U.S.-China-Russia Relationship and the Indo-Pacific Region" by The National Institute for Defense Studies (NIDS) (2022) contains extensive insights into the strategic triangle of the United States, Russia, and China, particularly in the period following the outbreak of the Ukraine war. This work asserts that the war in Ukraine has heightened the risk of major power competition in the Asia-Europe region, shaping geopolitical tensions in the region towards the formation of two opposing blocs. In this process, the United States, on one side, is mobilizing collective deterrent strength against the other side comprised of China and Russia. This backdrop incentivizes Beijing and Moscow to draw closer strategically, thus giving rise to a second Cold War characterized by the emergence of military risks at the brink of armed conflict (NIDS, 2022, p.49).

In Vietnam, there are also some works directly addressing the impacts of the US-China-Russia strategic triangle on Vietnam. Nguyễn Cảnh Toàn (2012), in the article "*Tác động của chiến lược Nga – Trung – Mỹ đối với châu Á – Thái Bình Dương và Việt Nam. Triển vọng*" [The Impact of the Russia-China-US Strategy on the Asia-Pacific and Vietnam.



The prospects], after clarifying the similarities and differences in strategic interests between Russia in the Asia-Pacific region compared to those of the United States and China, has issued a warning for Vietnam. According to the author, while a large-scale war is unlikely, tensions arising from overt provocations, blatant threats, or armed conflicts, including short-term clashes with high-tech weaponry, are entirely possible. In this context, the weaker party should remain vigilant and avoid falling into strategic traps set by major powers. Nguyen Hong Quan (2020) authored an article titled “Cục diện tam giác chiến lược Mỹ - Trung – Nga và một vài hàm ý cho Việt Nam” [The landscape of the US-China-Russia strategic triangle and some implications for Vietnam], in which he asserts that Vietnam needs to have a clearer understanding of the impacts of the strategies of Russia, the US, and China. Based on this, he advises Vietnam to adopt a flexible approach in its relations with the three major powers: (i) Regarding China, absolute clarity, avoidance of illusions, and vigilance are paramount (Nguyen, 2020, p.40); (ii) emphasizing substantive relations with the United States; (iii) enhancing political and diplomatic relations with Russia, but with finesse to ensure that Russia does not make statements detrimental to Vietnam when issues arise in Vietnam-China relations (e.g., in the South China Sea) (Nguyen, 2020, p.41).

In general, all the works mentioned above form a perspective on the relations among the three major powers – the United States, China, and Russia – as well as their impacts. A prominent point observed from the works is the competition among the three major countries in a bipolar manner, in which the United States primarily competes with both China and Russia. In the assessment space of the impacts of the strategies of the United States, Russia, and China in the Asia-Pacific region, some authors recommend that Vietnam should maintain pragmatic cooperation with all major countries, focusing on its national interests. However, studies’s analysis only extend up to the beginning of 2022. There has yet to be a comprehensive study systematically outlining the strategies of the three major powers - the United States, China, and Russia - in the Asia-Pacific region, closest to the present time. Specifically, there has been no article clarifying Vietnam's detailed response to the impacts of these strategies. Building upon existing literature, this paper aims to fill these academic gaps.

#### METHODOLOGY

The article seeks to answer two questions: (1) What strategic adjustments have the world's largest countries, namely the United States, Russia, and China, made following China's rise as the world's second-largest economy in 2010 and the escalation of tensions in Ukraine since 2013? And, (2) How has Vietnam responded to the impacts of these strategic adjustments in the Asia-Pacific region? To illuminate the issue theoretically, the author employs the theoretical lens of power balance in the article. The theory of power balance is well recognized in the study of international relations. It posits that, to avoid conflict and ensure national security, establishing a power balance is crucial, rather than relying solely on international law or institutions. Power balance also has a systematic meaning when it is intended to prevent the dominance or hegemony of any particular nation. Applied to this paper, the theory of power balance aids the author in elucidating the motivations behind the strategic adjustments of the United States, Russia, and China in a manner in which the U.S. seeks to curb China's power dominance, while both China and Russia seek similar measures vis-à-vis the U.S.

Additionally, the theory of power balance is utilized as a framework to interpret Vietnam's actions towards achieving a balanced relationship, namely towards balancing its relations with the three major powers: the United States, Russia, and China. Specifically, Vietnam maintains equilibrium in terms of the "power" or "position" of one great power with that of another in its foreign policy. In fact, Vietnam's balanced policy is based on the foreign policy idea of "equality among nations" advocated by Ho Chi Minh and is part of the foreign policy of "multilateralization and diversification, Vietnam wants to be friends with all parties in the international community" (Đảng cộng sản, 2020) that has been established since the 7th Party Congress (1991). However, with the aim of "balancing power among major countries in its own country", the balanced policy can be seen as a derivative case of the theory of power balance.

Based on this theoretical foundation, the author employs two typical methods in international relations research: policy analysis method and historical research method to elucidate the issue. The policy analysis method assists researchers in evaluating the motives, interests, and actions of a nation by clarifying the policies it adopts. Meanwhile, the historical research method aids in comprehensively elucidating the issue by systematically organizing events and data in chronological and spatial order. With a qualitative approach, the application of these methods will be carried out through the utilization of secondary data sources related to the foreign policies of the United States, Russia, China, and Vietnam to systematize information, analyze data from a historical perspective, and formulate assessments.

### STRATEGIC ADJUSTMENT OF MAJOR COUNTRIES

Since the second decade of the 21st century, international relations have witnessed numerous complex developments, largely driven by strategic adjustments made by major powers. The robust emergence of China, accompanied by initiatives and actions reflecting its global ambitions, has served as a catalyst for the increased presence of many big countries in the Asia-Pacific/Indian Ocean region. The two century-long goals of the "Chinese Dream" outlined by Xi Jinping following the 18th Party Congress (2012) stand as evidence of China's ambition and provide the basis for shifts in the foreign policies of several other major powers.

#### 1. China's strategic adjustments

China's strategic adjustment is epitomized through the initiative of "One Belt, One Road" (BRI), proposed by President Xi Jinping in September 2013. This initiative includes the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) and the 21st-century Maritime Silk Road (MSR), along with six economic corridors (Đỗ, 2020, p.257) that help China connect with countries along the BRI: (1) China-Mongolia-Russia; (2) New Eurasian Land Bridge; (3) China-Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor; (4) China-Peninsular Malaysia Economic Corridor; (5) China-Pakistan Economic Corridor; and (6) Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM). After a decade of implementation, the BRI has indeed evolved into China's global strategy, aimed at "the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation," realizing the "Chinese Dream" with two centenary goals: (i) comprehensively building a moderately prosperous society (China's eradication of poverty, becoming a moderately affluent society) to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China (1921-2021), and (ii) successfully constructing a modern socialist country that is civilized, democratic, prosperous, and harmonious (China's steadfast rise to become the world's leading power) in all respects on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the People's Republic of China (1949-2049).

To support the implementation of BRI, China has also formulated the "Major Country Diplomacy", "Neighborhood Diplomacy", and built a "Community of Shared Destiny for Mankind". In 2014, China introduced a new perspective on security in the Asia-Pacific region, emphasizing "Asian affairs should be managed by Asians", which starkly contrasts with its previous stance that "the Pacific is big enough to accommodate both China and the US" (Đông, 2016, p.103). This adjustment in perspective indicates China's desire to "push" the U.S. out of the region's hotspots, creating space for China to assert its role. China's initiatives, such as proposing the establishment of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), advocating for the creation of an Asia-Pacific free trade area (comprising the 21 APEC member economies), establishing the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and promoting the internationalization of the Renminbi, further solidify the argument regarding China's ambitions.

In broad terms, it can be observed that China aims to become the world's foremost superpower - a nation capable of "setting the rules of the game", breaking the "encirclement" of the US in the Asia-Pacific region, and restraining the rise of regional powers such as India, Japan, and even South Korea. However, the manner in which China implements its strategies to achieve these goals exhibits flexibility, incorporating both internal and external factors.



### **First, China activates the spirit of nationalism to achieve its goals.**

A distinctive feature of China's strategy is the interweaving of domestic and foreign factors. Specifically, China often activates nationalism by creating a context of "China being bullied" by other countries. From there, as Xi Jinping once affirmed: "Only socialism can save China and only the distinctive socialism of China can lead China to development". On this basis, "the realization of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" is "an irreversible historical process" (VOV, 2021).

In 2021, China declared the completion of its first centennial goal (VOV, 2021) by historically addressing the issue of poverty, laying the groundwork for the people's confidence in achieving the second centennial goal. Nationalism subsequently had the opportunity to transition naturally into populism. During the commemoration of the centenary anniversary of the establishment of the Communist Party of China in 2021, President Xi Jinping cautioned against "external forces" that would face "broken heads and spilled blood" in front of the Great Wall of Steel erected by the flesh and blood of over 1.4 billion Chinese citizens" if they were to "bully, oppress, or subjugate" China (VOV, 2021). Building upon this, he called upon all party members and the Chinese people to "forge unity", enhance awareness of potential risks, towards the second centennial goal in 2049. Clearly, the context of the "great Chinese nation being oppressed" easily elicits sympathy, thereby fostering unanimity with the government's foreign policy initiatives.

President Xi Jinping warned of the resilience of the nation's unity symbolized by the Great Wall of Steel, constructed through the collective efforts of over 1.4 billion Chinese citizens. He emphasized the readiness to confront any external influences that may attempt to disrupt this unity, stating that they would encounter firm resistance.

### **Second, China "economicizes" its political goals**

The process of globalization is intertwining military, economic, and political issues, with China utilizing its economy as a tool to achieve its strategic goals. Economically, it serves as the resource to assert political leverage and the backbone of China's military power. Its economic solutions operate smoothly, without much fanfare, yet yield significant effectiveness, leaving nations in conflict of security and political interests with China somewhat perplexed in response. Through initiatives like BRI, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and the New Development Bank (NDB) of BRICS countries, China emphasizes economic development, aiming for the prosperity of its people. However, the involvement of Chinese state-owned enterprises opens a path for political intervention. The case of Sri Lanka losing the Hambantota port to repay debts to China exemplifies what is termed as a "debt trap", a result of China's "economic solution" aimed at aiding this great power in achieving its political objectives.

Not only did it assist China in securing strategic locations, but the economic factor also garnered Beijing support for security issues, by "seducing" target countries. Cambodia is a case in point. Given Cambodia's significant geopolitical position in the history of Vietnam-Cambodia-China relations and its status as a non-claimant country in the South China Sea, China has supported Cambodia vigorously through an "unequal" approach, not based on any rule and regardless of the recipient's intended use. From 1994 to 2021, China has consistently been Cambodia's largest foreign direct investor (FDI), accounting for 43.9% of Cambodia's total FDI of \$41 billion (Chanrith Ngin, 2022). Additionally, Moreover, approximately 48% of Cambodia's official development assistance (ODA), totaling roughly \$7.22 billion, originates from China (CDC, 2021). Furthermore, China is Cambodia's leading creditor, holding 41% of its \$9.8 billion external debt (as of June 2022) (MEF, 2022). Based on this economic support, China has reaped numerous political benefits as Cambodia consistently demonstrates support for China's security stance. The absence of a collective declaration during the 45th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (AMM 45) in Cambodia in 2012 notably underscores China's considerable advancements in this domain.

### **Third, China advocates flexible behavior with relevant parties.**

*For the international community*, China consistently seeks to demonstrate a spirit of development and peace with all nations, for the collective benefit of humanity. This is the driving force behind its establishment of a "Community of Shared Destiny" - a concept reiterated more than 100 times in Chinese leaders' foreign statements since 2012 and enshrined in China's Constitution. Through the construction of this Community of Shared Destiny, China conveys a lofty message of equality among nations, fairness, mutual contribution for common interests, harmony, inclusiveness, respect for differences, and sustainable development (Denghua Zhang, 2018). According to some experts, this continues to be a recurring theme aimed at "dispelling strategic suspicions from outside about China's peaceful rise and maintaining an external environment conducive to China's development" (Denghua Zhang, 2018). In other words, the community of shared destiny serves as a space for China to showcase its global governance role and strengthen its leadership position. Like the domestic strategy of "winning hearts and minds", China promotes the shared interests of the global community to cultivate positive sentiment, and it may adapt its approaches accordingly, even if only on the surface.

Therefore, when criticized for its nine-dash line ambitions regarding the Philippines' lawsuit against China in the International Tribunal in 2016, China substituted the term "Four Sha" for the phrase "cow's tongue line" which evokes a rather negative image. The White Paper "China's Firm Determination to Resolve Disputes between China and the Philippines through Negotiation" released immediately after the Tribunal's ruling (7/2016), asserted that China's sovereignty and maritime rights include: i) sovereignty over islands in the South China Sea, namely the Dongsha, Xisha, Zhongsha, and Nansha Islands; ii) China's islands in the South China Sea have internal waters, territorial seas, and contiguous zones; iii) China's islands in the South China Sea have exclusive economic zones and continental shelves; and iv) China has historical rights in the South China Sea (The State Council, 2016). After the 19th Party Congress (October 2017), China emphasized the legal status of the "Four Sha" even more. The "Four Sha" strategy, incorporating internal waters, territorial seas, contiguous zones, exclusive economic zones, and continental shelves, aligns in scope with the previously employed "Nine-Dash Line" strategy. The new approach of the Xi Jinping administration can be interpreted as a rhetorical tactic, particularly in light of the adverse responses received from the global community.

*For the United States* and other countries criticizing China, China has also shown flexibility. Since 2013, China has not "hidden" itself and cannot "hide" itself due to its increasing comprehensive strength, as well as the initiatives and actions that this country is determined to implement to realize the Chinese dream. The "China challenge" is gradually becoming evident in the foreign policies of major powers. Because accompanying China's enhanced core interests is the diminishing strategic interests of many other major countries. China's implementation of BRI has been criticized by the US and many Western countries as creating a "debt trap"; mechanisms established by China such as AIIB, NDB are seen as evidence of ambitions to construct a new world order dominated by China; decisive actions in the South China Sea are opposed, and increased cooperation with many Asian countries is suspected of political motives. In response to reactions from the US and the West, initially, China adopted a "conciliatory" approach, seeking to promote a "new type of major-country relationship" based on the principles of "no conflict, no confrontation, mutual respect, and win-win cooperation"<sup>1</sup>. However, during the Donald Trump era, the US initiated a trade war with China. Consequently, China resorted to "wolf warrior diplomacy", adopting a firm stance and "tit-for-tat" responses with the US and countries supporting the U.S. stance. In 2021, Xi Jinping still exhibited a "fighting" spirit with the U.S. by welcoming China's decisive approach, stating that the country had "enhanced the spirit of struggle" and "emphasized national dignity and core interests in the struggle" (Quang Trinh, 2022).

---

<sup>1</sup> "New type of major country relations" was launched by China during the unofficial visit to the US by Chinese President Xi Jinping in June 2013. See Lê Thế Mầu. (2014). Đôi nét về quan hệ nước lớn kiểu mới trong cục diện chính trị thế giới hiện nay [Some features of new-style major power relations in the current world political situation]. Tạp chí Quốc phòng toàn dân, <http://tapchiquoptd.vn/vi/quoc-phong-quan-su-nuoc-ngoai/doi-net-ve-quan-he-nuoc-lon-kieu-moi-trong-cuc-dien-chinh-tri-the-gioi-hien-nay/5018.html>.



During the presidency of Joe Biden, tensions between the two countries continued to be reinforced through a series of events: the shooting down of a Chinese balloon (4/2/2023); friction in the South China Sea, disagreements over the Taiwan issue, the Russia-Ukraine conflict, technology competition, trade protectionism, etc. However, China has still shown a cooperative spirit with the US when opportunities arise. Evidence of this is Chinese President Xi Jinping's two summit meetings with US President Joe Biden at the G20 Summit (Indonesia, 11/14/2022) and at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit 2023 (USA, 11/15/2023). These significant encounters have helped both countries improve their tense relationship and share perspectives on global issues.

In its engagements with major nations, China demonstrates a pragmatic strategy akin to that of the US, guided by the principle of 4C - "Cooperation" when feasible, "Compete" when suitable, "Confront" when required, and steering clear of direct "Conflict".

*For countries with sovereignty claims in the South China Sea, China pursues a dual policy. On one hand, China demonstrates a spirit of goodwill, promoting the building of a common destiny community. However, on the other hand, this nation shows inconsistency between rhetoric and actions. For instance, in its relations with Vietnam, China mainly exploits the ZOPA - the "zone of possible cooperation" of the Vietnam-China relationship. Besides enhancing economic cooperation and cultural exchanges, in terms of security and defense, China adeptly sidelines the issue of the South China Sea, ensuring both sides can still cooperate in areas of mutual interest. Coordinated activities of a non-traditional nature such as joint patrols in the Gulf of Tonkin for security protection, cooperation in rescue and relief efforts, or border exchanges fall within this scope.*

However, beyond the "cooperation when possible and in possible areas", China exhibits inconsistency between commitments and actions on the ground. In meetings with Vietnamese leaders, China has repeatedly pledged "...not to undertake actions to complicate or expand disputes; to maintain peace and stability in the South China Sea" (Nhân dân, 2017), but in reality, it continues to openly encroach upon Vietnam's maritime territory. The incident involving the HD981 oil rig in 2014 (despite China's commitment to "not undertake any further complicating actions" during Prime Minister Lý Kỳảng's visit to Vietnam in 2013), the actions of the Haiyang 8 vessel in 2019, and China's illegal issuance of bans on fishing in Vietnam's waters, clashing with Vietnamese fishermen, etc., are evidence of China's inconsistency. With the "salami-slicing" strategy, China is gradually eroding the South China Sea by silently constructing military outposts, turning coral reefs into artificial islands, thereby creating a counterfeit "legal basis" that confuses the international community and complicates disputes in the South China Sea for other claimants.

More dangerously, China has repeatedly bullied neighboring countries with sovereignty claims by illegally issuing orders to prohibit fishing, encroaching on the exclusive economic zones and continental shelves of those countries (such as the Haiyang Shiyou 981/HY 981 oil rig incident and the HD8 incident in Vietnam, in 2014 and 2019 respectively), ramming into fishing vessels... The danger lies in the fact that China seemingly always knowing how to "control" these actions so they do not escalate into armed conflicts or face fierce reactions from relevant parties. And the repetition of bullying actions serves to acclimate the international community to China's "management". The case of the Haiyang Shiyou 8 vessel repeatedly encroaching on Vietnam's exclusive economic zone and continental shelf in 2019<sup>2</sup> is regarded as emblematic of China's adoption of such a strategy.

## **2. The United States' strategic adjustment**

Since China became the world's 2<sup>nd</sup> largest economy in 2010 and pursued two century goals, the risk of China "usurping" has always been a concern for the US. In the United States' perspective, China stands as the sole nation possessing significant economic, military, technological, and political influence capable of challenging both American interests and the prevailing global order. Therefore, the US has made significant strategic adjustments, emphasizing the Asia-Pacific region (since 2017, the Indo-Pacific) to contain China's rising power. This trend has been consistently implemented by the United States through its "pivot" and "rebalance" policies towards Asia, initiated as early as

---

<sup>2</sup> During nearly 4 months (from July 3, 2019 to October 24, 2019), China's Haiyang Dizhi 8 entered and left Vietnam's waters four times.

2011 and since 2017 through the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy (FOIP). Although under different names, FOIP is considered as a follow-up to the "containment of China" trend from the previous Pivot/Rebalance policies. Through this adjustment, besides directly increasing pressure on China, the US tightens its alliances and enhances cooperation with strategic partners in the region.

#### ***Under President Donald Trump's administration***

Despite the initiation of the pivot policy in 2011, the US, under President Barack Obama, maintained a relatively accommodating stance toward China. This approach primarily aimed to establish the groundwork for the reassertion of the foremost global power in the region. However, the era of President Donald Trump brought about a notable difference, marking a turning point in the tense phase of US-China relations. The US National Security Strategy (NSS), announced in December 2017, unequivocally identified China and Russia as the primary challenges to the US, stating that "China seeks to replace the US in the Indo-Pacific region, seeking to reshape the regional order in a way that is advantageous to China" (White House, 2017, p.25). Consequently, the US is willing to collaborate with all countries in the region on a reciprocal basis, emphasizing the importance of enhancing relations with Vietnam, Indonesia, and other Southeast Asian countries, "to help them become maritime cooperation partners" (White House, 2017, p.47).

The United States acknowledges and fully supports Japan's significant leadership position as a pivotal ally in the Asian region. It also embraces India's ascension as a prominent global force and values its evolving role as a robust defense and strategic partner of the United States. Furthermore, the United States aims to bolster quadrilateral connection with India, Japan, Australia (The White House, 2017, p.46). This commitment is underscored in the Security Strategy, where the United States has delineated its allies, partners, and adversaries within the Indo-Pacific framework. Notably, the Quad's role is deemed indispensable, and the United States stands prepared to collaborate closely with Japan and India, sharing leadership responsibilities on regional matters. Additionally, the United States has publicly articulated its policy of enhancing diplomatic ties with select Southeast Asian nations possessing strategic geographical significance, including Vietnam and Indonesia, both of which are embroiled in disputes with China in the South China Sea.

The National Defense Strategy (NDS) released in early 2018 maintains a focus on the enduring competition with China as perceived by the United States. Its objective is to uphold a favorable power equilibrium for the U.S. in the Indo-Pacific region, while also safeguarding the freedom and openness of shared spaces (US Department of Defense, 2018). The phrases "free" and "open" are consistently associated with the Indo-Pacific in U.S. statements. U.S. interpretations of "freedom", including freedom of navigation, overflight; freedom of policy choice; and partnerships free from coercion, are goals of independent, autonomous, peace-loving nations. However, the "freedom" that the US refers to is always accompanied by criticism of China's actions in the South China Sea and the East China Sea. Similarly, the notion of "openness" in U.S. calls implies criticism of China's Belt and Road Initiative, which is still condemned by the US as a one-way initiative, benefiting only China through an exclusive network of infrastructure dominated by China, thereby turning China's partners into nothing more than debtors.

Evidence shows that following US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's address on the Indo-Pacific Economic Vision (IPEV) initiative on July 30, 2018, coupled with the successive announcement of financial packages totaling \$413 million for the Indo-Pacific region aimed at advancing common priorities, particularly in maritime security, humanitarian assistance, peacekeeping, and addressing cross-border threats; at APEC 2018, US Vice President Mike Pence "reminded" regional nations that the US presents superior proposals, does not trap its partners in debt, does not coerce, does not compromise on the sovereignty of independent nations, and does not promote one-way belts and roads. He emphasized that when nations are partners with the US, the US will be a partner to those nations, fairly and openly, ensuring shared prosperity for all (The White House, 2018).

In the context of BRI facing considerable criticism over corruption scandals, concerns regarding opaque finances, delays in project implementation, or the debt trap stemming from Beijing's loans; the emergence of the Indo-Pacific Economic Vision (IPEV) accompanied by Mike Pence's admonition delineates a clear boundary, allowing regional



nations to readily compare a side offering opportunities for mutual development, represented by the US, against a side carrying risks, represented by China.

Subsequently, on December 31, 2018, President Donald Trump enacted the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act (ARIA) into law, affirming that the President should "enhance the enforcement of intellectual property laws, including taking appropriate actions to prevent and punish" violations (US Congress, 2018). This provision is essentially aimed at China, a country that has often been accused by Washington of infringing upon U.S. intellectual property. In line with a stronger stance towards China, the new law also proposes that the U.S. should "regularly transfer defense-related data to Taiwan to counter existing and potential threats from China in the future" (US Congress, 2018). Alongside the law encouraging high-level visits between US and Taiwan officials in March 2018, this aspect of ARIA continues to demonstrate the United States' open confrontation with China.

The U.S. Department of Defense's Indian Ocean-Pacific Strategy Report, issued on June 1, 2019, continues to focus on China. In the section discussing regional political trends and challenges, the report characterized China as a negative actor, actively "disrupting" the international system. China's coercive actions, agreements perceived as one-sided, burdening partners with debt, and contravening the principles of "freedom" and "openness" outlined in the Indo-Pacific strategy (US Department of Defense, 2019) were all extensively cataloged. Notably, four out of the eight pages in this section were dedicated solely to China, underscoring U.S. interest in China's "challenge".

Based on the description of these negative actions, the report indicates that, in order to maintain influence and achieve objectives in the region, the US needs to be prepared, engage in partnerships, and promote regional connectivity. Accordingly, the U.S. will (i) maintain readiness for combat, while enhancing force modernization to meet high-level competition demands; (ii) foster cooperation with allies and partners in the Indian Ocean-Pacific region, from major players like India to smaller states like Laos, Cambodia, and Mongolia; and finally (iii), strengthen regional connectivity through U.S. security assets to closely collaborate with allies and partners in managing, coordinating, and resolving regional issues. With this report, the U.S. demonstrates comprehensive strategic preparedness, displaying a "ready to confront" stance towards China on all fronts. Listing Laos, Cambodia, and other potential partners for enhanced cooperation affirms U.S. concern regarding competition with China not only within its immediate sphere of influence but also in regions susceptible to influence from East Asian countries.

#### ***President Joe Biden's administration***

Under President Joe Biden's administration, the Indo-Pacific remains a focal point of U.S. foreign policy, despite the ongoing conflict in Ukraine which is affecting the geopolitical landscape of Europe - a longstanding ally region of the US.

In September 2021, the US, in conjunction with the United Kingdom and Australia, announced the formation of the Trilateral Security Partnership known as AUKUS, with the objective of fostering a free, open, secure, and stable Indo-Pacific region. The establishment of AUKUS coincided with the decision to assist Australia in procuring nuclear-powered submarines equipped with conventional weaponry (SSNs) (Australia Embassy, 2023), a measure widely interpreted as directed towards China, against the backdrop of strained relations between Australia and China stemming from the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the beginning of 2022, when Russia launched a "special military campaign" in Ukraine, causing upheaval in European politics, the administration of U.S. President Joe Biden officially announced the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy, with five pillars: Freedom and openness, Connectivity, Prosperity, Security, and Resilience. This action further reaffirmed the unchanged commitment of the US to the Indo-Pacific region as well as to the trend of containing China.

In a move to solidify commitment, at the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue Summit held in May 2022 in Tokyo (Japan), President Joe Biden, along with leaders from 13 nations, signed and issued the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF). The primary focus areas of the IPEF's inaugural agenda will encompass four key pillars: (i) equitable and adaptable trade practices; (ii) bolstering supply chain resilience; (iii) advancing infrastructure and promoting clean energy initiatives; and (iv) implementing measures to combat tax evasion and address issues of corruption. As of November 2023, the IPEF has convened three direct dialogues (Ministry of Commerce and

Industry, 2023) to discuss these issues. With a scope emphasizing sustainable development and the collective prosperity of humanity, the IPEF is regarded as a framework contributing to the strategic security of the Indo-Pacific region, while also serving as a platform for the US to maintain influence following its withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (subsequently renamed the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership - CPTPP).

The latest National Security Strategy (NSS) of the US, issued in October 2022, more clearly reflects America's stance towards China in particular, and the Indo-Pacific region in general. NSS 2022 identifies Russia and China as "the most urgent strategic challenges" for the US, but within that context, China is termed as "the foremost geopolitical challenge" (The White House, 2022). The shift from placing Russia and China on equal footing in NSS 2017 to identifying China as the "most dangerous challenge" in NSS 2022 indicates that, in the US perspective, the conflict in Ukraine only relegates Russia to a "time-limited threat" rather than altering the strategic focus of the US.

However, to achieve the benefits, especially in the competitive trend with China, the US under the Joe Biden administration has adopted a much more flexible approach. The 2022 NSS emphasizes investing in domestic capabilities to maintain competitive advantages, particularly in areas such as industry innovation, human resources, and democracy. Moreover, the Biden administration does not adhere to "isolationism" as seen during the Trump era, instead describing the role of multilateralism in a more positive light. The new NSS reaffirms the value of allies, partners, open alliances, and multilateral initiatives, from the global to regional level, such as the United Nations, NATO, Quad, AUKUS, ASEAN, Infrastructure Partnership and Global Investment (PGII), or the Indian Ocean-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF). Particularly, the 2022 NSS underscores the role of a "rule-based order", mentioning this concept eight times (The White House, 2022). These adjustments have positioned the US as a willing partner in the Indo-Pacific region, and its practical implementations have affirmed this characteristic of the Joe Biden administration.

In November 2022, during the ASEAN high-level summit in Cambodia, the US and ASEAN mutually advanced their association to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. ASEAN has always emphasized economic cooperation and other development-related issues, refraining from aligning with any particular bloc or building military-oriented alliances. This event thus underscores the flexible approach of the US, which respects differences and is willing to collaborate as a partner. President Joe Biden's speech on August 10, 2023, further affirmed this argument. Accordingly, the United States hopes that Cambodia (along with Vietnam) can become part of the QUAD relationship, in a form of "relationship-building" rather than a "defense alliance" (The White House, 2023), aligning with the foreign policy direction of both countries. The flexible shift by the US also marks a significant turning point for the Vietnam-US relationship, paving the way for the two nations to upgrade their relationship to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in October 2023.

### **3. Russia's strategic shift**

Russia is also a significant player on the chessboard of major power relations. Under the presidency of V. Putin, Russia has been gradually restoring its influence through the "Turn to the East" policy. This policy, announced by President V. Putin in 2010, aims to (i) leverage the potential of rapidly developing economies in Central Asia and the Transcaucasus region to attract investment for the development of Siberia and Russia's Far East; (ii) access the large energy resource markets in the Asia - Pacific region, positioning Russia as the world's largest energy exporter; (iii) expand the market for weapons and military equipment in Asia - Pacific region (Đông, 2016, p.104). Implementing the "Turn to the East" policy, strengthening Russia's internal strength through the resource-rich Far East (Russia) thus is associated with strengthening Russia's relations with countries in the Asia-Pacific region, with a particular focus on China, India, Vietnam, Brazil, and the BRICS group.



However, the historical East-West confrontation during the Cold War, along with new developments in the post-Soviet space, has led to significant differences in Russia's implementation of its Eastward policy in two stages: before and after the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014. Prior to that, Russia strengthened security, political, and economic cooperation with Asia-Pacific countries in a relatively balanced manner, but after the outbreak of conflict in Ukraine, Russia's Eastward policy tended to prioritize China quite noticeably.

#### **Russia's balancing act**

Russia demonstrates its equilibrium in its handling of diplomatic ties with China and Vietnam, especially regarding the contentious matter of the South China Sea, where both nations assert territorial claims. Particularly, "Russia does not oppose China's policy but still shows empathy towards Vietnam's concerns regarding the South China Sea issue" (Alexander Korolev, 2017), while simultaneously enhancing economic and political cooperation with both countries. From 2013 to 2017, China was Russia's second-largest arms buyer (Aude Fleurant et al, 2017, p.2). Russia's military cooperation with China has developed to the extent that President Vladimir Putin referred to Beijing as a "natural partner and natural ally" (Aude Fleurant et al, 2017, p.2). Since 2013, both nations have augmented collaborative military drills, extending from the Sea of Japan and the Mediterranean to the South China Sea. Additionally, they have actively advocated for multilateral training frameworks within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). A noteworthy event was Russia's engagement in joint exercises with China in the South China Sea in September 2016 (Joint Sea 2016), highlighting China's significance to Russia during that period.

In addition to China, Russia has bolstered its diplomatic ties with Vietnam. Historically, Vietnam served as an ally to Russia during the Cold War era, establishing itself as Russia's primary partner in Southeast Asia. Notably, from 2013 to 2017, Vietnam ranked as the world's third-largest purchaser of Russian arms, trailing only behind India and China (Aude Fleurant et al., 2017, p.2). Moreover, Vietnam holds strategic importance for Russia across various sectors including oil and gas exploration, machinery manufacturing, and energy production, thereby contributing significantly to bilateral cooperation efforts.

Since 2008, Vietnam and Russia have signed an agreement worth \$3.2 billion (Carlyle A. Thayer, 2012) for Russia to supply Vietnam with 6 Project 636M Kilo-class submarines. This agreement marked a significant milestone in Russia's defense export history, representing the largest contract up to that point (Sadhavi Chauhan, 2013). Moreover, the Kilo submarine agreement facilitated Russia's increased presence at Vietnam's esteemed Cam Ranh Bay, facilitating various ancillary activities such as crew training and the establishment of onshore maintenance facilities. Furthermore, Russia has underscored its dedication to Vietnam through collaborative ventures in oil and gas exploration in the South China Sea. Notably, in 2012, Gazprom, in partnership with PetroVietnam, pursued gas exploitation in Blocks 5.2 and 5.3—a venture previously abandoned by BP of the United Kingdom due to pressures from China (Gazprom, 2012).

In regards to the South China Sea issue, during this period, Russia has displayed a "foggy strategy," simultaneously supporting China's stance of "resolving the issue bilaterally rather than multilaterally" while endorsing Vietnam's approach of "relying on international law". In August 2015, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov addressed the media regarding the joint Russia-China military exercises, asserting that Russia's stance is for the disputing parties in the South China Sea to seek a resolution without external interference (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2015). Moreover, in April 2016, during a meeting with his Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi, on the sidelines of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Lavrov reaffirmed this position by stating, "The disputes in the South China Sea should remain within the purview of the involved parties and not be subject to internationalization or external intervention" (Gordon G. Chang, 2016).

The statement made in 2016 drew considerable attention amidst China's active pursuit of backing during the Philippines' nearing resolution of its dispute with China. This attention stemmed from indications suggesting that the International Tribunal was poised to reject China's claims in the South China Sea. At the G20 Summit in Hangzhou in September 2016, Russian President Vladimir Putin publicly expressed solidarity with China's stance of not recognizing the tribunal's ruling (Alexander Korolev, 2018). Nevertheless, while refraining from endorsing

internationalization, which entails opposition to U.S. involvement in the South China Sea matter, Russia reiterated its longstanding position against any militarization in the region. Emphasizing a commitment to resolving all issues through political and diplomatic channels, Russia advocated for negotiations among the involved parties based on international law, aiming to reach mutually acceptable resolutions.

One pertinent legal framework is the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), along with agreements forged between ASEAN countries and China, such as the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2015). Following President Putin's contentious remarks during the 2016 G20 summit, Russia promptly reiterated that its support for China's stance on non-recognition of the arbitral tribunal's ruling did not deviate from its neutral position and remained detached from matters of sovereignty or politics (Anton Tsvetov, 2017). Some experts perceive Russia's apparent sensitivity to "external factors" as originating from its historical reluctance towards Western engagement in the post-Soviet region, along with its longstanding criticism of foreign interventions in regions such as the Balkans, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya (Anton Tsvetov, 2017).

Furthermore, one of the motivations behind President Putin's 2016 statement is that the precedent set by China in rejecting arbitral rulings could prove advantageous for Russia in the event of an unfavorable ruling regarding Ukraine. However, Russia also has strategic calculations aimed at safeguarding the resource-rich Far East region, which borders a perpetually resource-hungry China. Additionally, maintaining traditional relations with Vietnam provides a platform for expanding Russia's influence in the Asia-Pacific region. These are the reasons why Russia maintains a relative balance in its relations with strategic partners.

#### **Strongly promote relations with China**

The annexation of the Crimean Peninsula by Russia in 2014 marked a turning point that prompted Russia to make significant strategic adjustments, distancing itself from the West and tightening its relations with China. Historically, Russia has been regarded more as a European power than an Asian one, despite its territory spanning both continents. Even when initiating the idea of a "pivot to the East" in the late 2000s, Russia remained more focused on cooperation with the West than with Asia. However, Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 officially marked the end of the era of Russia-West cooperation, particularly as this trend has steadily diminished and become more challenging following Russia's military campaign in Ukraine in February 2022.

From Russia's reaction on the Ukrainian battlefield, it is evident that Russia seeks to assert its national power in the manner it deems fit and will not compromise with NATO's eastward expansion, which threatens Russia's borders, even if it means resorting to the use of force. Immediately after launching the "special military operation" in Ukraine, President Putin declared the end of the "unipolar world era" (Reuters, 2022), stating that Russia is entering a new global order where its rules will be set by "strong and sovereign states", and Russia is a "strong and modern state".

In that context, Russia has been increasingly advancing its Eastward policy through building closer relations with China. Initially, despite signing a \$400 billion energy contract with China (Brian Carlson et al, 2018, p.32), Russia has endeavored to maintain a balance in the Asia-Pacific region, as analyzed. Against the backdrop of harsh criticism from the Western world, this contract holds significant political significance for Russia, demonstrating that Russia is not isolated in the international arena and still maintains influence. The Ukraine conflict subsequently escalated into armed conflict, further driving Russia towards China. On February 4, 2022 - shortly before the armed conflict in Ukraine, Russia and China established a "unlimited" partnership (Elizabeth Wishnick & Andrew Taffer, 2022), in which both sides committed to supporting each other in the confrontation in Ukraine and Taiwan, as well as cooperating in countering the West.

Tightening relations with China not only helps Russia break the "encirclement" from the West but also assists Russia in achieving its strategic goal - building a multipolar world dominated by multiple powers instead of U.S. global hegemony. In this regard, China obviously plays a crucial role in achieving this new global balance. Russia resonates with China's slogan: "Asia for Asians" because it implies a reduction in the influence of the US. Based on this, Russia's



implementation of its Eastward policy also aims to reduce U.S. global dominance, and it will be pursued through policy adjustments aimed at enhancing Russia-China relations.

In general, Russia is employing a smart approach, combining both hard and soft power, between diplomacy and military threats, to overturn the order established since the Cold War. Concerned about its diminishing influence in the post-Soviet space, Russia is seeking to prevent countries like Ukraine and Georgia from gravitating towards the West, while also preventing the Asia-Pacific region from becoming a sphere of influence for the US. Russia's strategic adjustment is likely to create a third foothold for the Asia-Pacific region.

### VIETNAM'S RESPONSE

As a country with historical ties to the US, Russia, and China, the strategic adjustments of these major powers create both opportunities and challenges for Vietnam in balancing relations and safeguarding national interests. On the one hand, Vietnam has additional room to enhance cooperation with major countries, successfully implement the policy of multilateralism and diversify foreign relations, thereby enhancing resilience and ensuring national security. On the other hand, the fact that major countries America, Russia, and China have complicated relationships and have strategic adjustments that focus on the Asia-Pacific region puts a lot of pressure on Vietnam in implementing its foreign policy.

In response to the complexities of the world situation, Vietnam has steadfastly pursued a foreign policy characterized by independence, autonomy, proactive integration, and enhanced effectiveness in international cooperation, oriented towards "dynamic balance".

The balanced policy has been proven to bring the greatest benefits to Vietnam in its relations with major countries. This is also the key for Vietnam to leverage opportunities and mitigate challenges posed by strategic adjustments of major powers. Maintaining a balanced relationship sends the message of "not being a latent enemy" to anyone, thereby fostering a certain level of similarity with all nations - which is the foundation for building bilateral and multilateral relationships in international relations. This policy becomes increasingly important for small and medium-sized countries because, with limited capabilities, being drawn into great power competition (by choosing sides, becoming an ally of a major power) will result in greater losses for smaller nations. Furthermore, relations with major powers are inherently complex, capable of shifting if compromises are reached among them, and if necessary, these countries are willing to negotiate at the expense of smaller nations. Vietnam has deeply experienced this lesson throughout its history.

The United States' "abandonment" of its ally, the Republic of Vietnam, when China invaded the Paracel Islands in 1974 amidst warming US-China relations, provided Vietnam with a profound lesson on the nature of relations between major powers and the "futility" of "taking sides" when there is no longer any value or benefit to the ally. Similarly, the encirclement hostility against Vietnam when it was an ally of the Soviet Union during the tension between the Soviet Union and the US, and the Soviet Union and China, made Vietnam keenly aware of the cost of taking sides. Moreover, the Soviet Union's somewhat "delayed response" to China's aggression against Vietnam in the Spratly Islands in 1988 further reinforced Vietnam's understanding of the pragmatism of major powers. This is why Vietnam consistently adheres to a policy of balance, regardless of how complex the relationships between the great powers may be.

However, effectively implementing balance and avoiding suspicion amidst fierce competition among major countries is not easy. The practical reactions of superpowers towards Vietnam following the armed conflict in Ukraine have shown that mutual understanding is extremely important. When information about Vietnam's abstention votes at the United Nations General Assembly spread, initially, Vietnam couldn't avoid suspicions about "taking sides." However, Vietnam quickly clarified the message through various diplomatic channels about the principles of "four no's" (Bộ Quốc phòng Việt Nam, 2019, p.25)); about its foreign independence, autonomy, and "choosing righteousness rather than taking sides", which helped alleviate these concerns.

Additionally, Vietnam simultaneously maintains high-level contacts with China and upgrades its relationship to a Comprehensive Strategic Partner with South Korea (2022), the US (2023), Japan (2023), and Australia (2024, amidst the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, which somewhat validates the success in conveying messages as well as the appropriateness of this Southeast Asian country's balanced, independent, and autonomous foreign policy approach. Obviously, Vietnam's actions in this complex era of major power competition do not reflect the so-called "swinging on a tightrope", but rather a "walking on a tightrope" – meaning maintaining balance and traversing on that delicate tightrope.

### CONCLUSION

In general, the strategic adjustments of major countries such as the US, Russia, and China have been pronounced since the second decade of the 21st century, with a focus on the Asia-Pacific region. A notable aspect of the implementation of foreign policies by these powers during this period is the flexibility in approaching various entities and partners to contend with and cooperate toward strategic objectives. The Quad, propelled by the US, India, Japan and Australia, has evolved toward a more comprehensive direction, covering all areas of national and human interest. The US has intensified cooperation with Southeast Asian countries, prioritizing economic development over emphasizing security factors from a traditional standpoint. Meanwhile, China, technically, also makes adjustments more in the direction of "for humanity". Russia interprets its actions towards promoting balance and fairness in the Asian region. However, even in a softer form, the adjustments of the three major powers still reflect strategic competition or strategic tension, specifically in the US-China competition and US-Russia tensions. Since the root of the competition among the three powers - the US, China, and Russia - stems from conflicting strategic interests, this competitive form is unlikely to change in the near future, though there may be varying degrees if the US government undergoes a change in leadership in the upcoming election.

For Vietnam, it finds itself in a challenging position as a factor amidst the competition between the US and China, and to some extent, the tensions between the US and Russia. However, drawing from historical lessons and the imperative of diversifying foreign relations, Vietnam has adhered to and will continue to uphold a policy of "dynamic equilibrium" with major powers. This entails maintaining a balanced position regardless of evolving complexity within the US-China-Russia relationship.

### REFERENCES

- Anton Tsvetov. (2017). Russia's tactics and strategy in South China sea. *CSIS*. <https://amti.csis.org/russias-tactics-strategy-south-china-sea/>, accessed March 27, 2024.
- Artyom Lukin. (2021). The Russia-US-China Strategic Triangle in the Asia-Pacific. in Akaha T., Yuan J., Liang W. (eds). (2021). *Trump's America and International Relations in the Indo-Pacific - Theoretical Analysis of Changes & Continuities*, Springer, pp.99-120.
- Alexander Korolev. (2018). Russia in the South China Sea: Balancing and Hedging. *Foreign Policy Analysis*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/fpa/orx015>.
- Alexander Korolev. (2017). The Two Levels of Russia's South China Sea Policies, *East West center*. <https://www.eastwestcenter.org/system/tdf/private/apb376.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=36045>, accessed March 27, 2024.
- Aude Fleurant, Pieter D. Wezeman, Siemon T. Wezeman, Nan Tian, Alexandra Kuimova. (2017). *Trends in International arms transfers 2017*. Sipri.
- Australian Embassy in Vietnam. (2023). *Tuyên Bố Chung Aukus về Tàu Ngầm Chạy Bằng Năng Lượng Hạt Nhân [Aukus Joint Declaration on Nuclear Powered Submarines]*. [https://vietnam.embassy.gov.au/hnoivietnamese/JS\\_230314\\_VN.html](https://vietnam.embassy.gov.au/hnoivietnamese/JS_230314_VN.html), accessed March 27, 2024.



- Brian Carlson, Severin Fischer, Tim Prior, Jack Thompson. (2018). Strategic trends 2018: Key developments in global affairs. *ETH Zürich Center for Security Studies (CSS)*.
- Bộ Quốc phòng Việt Nam. (2019). *Quốc phòng Việt Nam 2019* [2019 Vietnam Defense]. Nxb Chính trị Quốc gia - Sự thật, Hà Nội.
- Chanrith Ngin. (2022). The Undetermined Costs and Benefits of Cambodia's Engagement with China's Belt and Road Initiative. *ISEAS Perspective 2022/84*, <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/articles-commentaries/iseas-perspective/2022-84-the-undetermined-costs-and-benefits-of-cambodias-engagement-with-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-by-chanrith-ngin/>, accessed March 27, 2024.
- Council for the Development of Cambodia (CDC). (2021). *Development cooperation and partnership report*, Phnom Penh: CDC
- Carlyle A. Thayer. (2012). Russian subs in Vietnam. *USNI News*. <http://news.usni.org/2012/08/20/russian-subs-vietnam>, accessed March 27, 2024.
- Đảng cộng sản. (2020). Đại hội VII: "Chủ nghĩa Mác - Lênin và tư tưởng Hồ Chí Minh là nền tảng tư tưởng, kim chỉ nam cho hành động của Đảng [Congress VII: "Marxism - Leninism and Ho Chi Minh's thought are the ideological foundation and guideline for the Party's actions]. *Đảng Cộng sản*. <https://dangcongsan.vn/huong-toi-ky-niem-90-nam-ngay-truyen-thong-nganh-tuyen-giao/thong-tin-tu-lieu/dai-hoi-vii-chu-nghia-mac-lenin-va-tu-tuong-ho-chi-minh-la-nen-tang-tu-tuong-kim-chi-nam-cho-hanh-dong-cua-dang-556900.html>, accessed March 27, 2024.
- Đỗ Thị Thủy (ed). (2020). *Những vận động mới của trật tự thế giới và cục diện khu vực Ấn Độ Dương - Thái Bình Dương* [New movements of the world order and the situation in the Indo-Pacific region]. Nxb Thế giới, Hà Nội.
- Đồng Xuân Thọ. (2016). Sự điều chỉnh chiến lược của các nước lớn đối với khu vực châu Á - Thái Bình Dương [Strategic adjustments of major countries towards the Asia-Pacific region]. *Tạp chí Cộng sản*, số 887.
- Denghua Zhang. (2018). The Concept of 'Community of Common Destiny' in China's Diplomacy: Meaning, Motives and Implications. *Asia & The Pacific Policy Studies* 5, No. 2, 196–207.
- Elizabeth Wishnick & Andrew Taffer. (2022). Ukraine invasion tests the relationship between Russia and China. *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/03/14/ukraine-russia-china-partnership-test/>, accessed March 27, 2024.
- Elizabeth Wishnick. (2009). *Russia, China, and the United States in central Asia: Prospects for great power competition and cooperation in the shadow of the Georgian crisis*. Strategic Studies Institute
- Gazprom. (2012). Gazprom joins licensed blocks development project offshore Vietnam. *Gazprom*. <http://www.gazprom.com/press/news/2012/april/article132762/>, accessed March 27, 2024.
- Gordon G. Chang. (2016). Great Power Confrontation in the South China Sea. *World Affairs*. <http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/blog/gordon-g-chang/great-power-confrontation-south-china-sea>, accessed March 27, 2024.
- Irina Minakova, Tatyana Bukreeva, Olga Solodukhina and Artyom Golovin. (2021). *The USA, Russia and China as a Center of Influence in Global Economy*. SHS Web of Conferences 92
- Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF). (2022). *Cambodia Public Debt Statistical Bulletin* No. 14, 2022, Phnom Penh: MEF.
- Ministry of Commerce and Industry (India). (2023). Shri Piyush Goyal participates in the 3rd in-person Ministerial meeting of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF). <https://commerce.gov.in/press-releases/shri-piyush-goyal-participates-in-the-3rd-in-person-ministerial-meeting-of-the-indo-pacific-economic-framework-ipef/>, accessed March 27, 2024.
- Nguyễn Cảnh Toàn. (2012). *Tác động của chiến lược Nga – Trung – Mỹ đối với châu Á – Thái Bình Dương và Việt Nam. Triển vọng* [The impact of the Russia - China - US strategy on Asia - Pacific and Vietnam. Prospects]. *European studies review* No 64 9 (144), 63-68.

- Nguyễn Hồng Quân. (2020). Cục diện tam giác chiến lược Mỹ - Trung - Nga và một vài hàm ý cho Việt Nam [The landscape of the US - China - Russia strategic triangle and some implications for Vietnam]. *Tạp chí nghiên cứu châu Phi và Trung Đông* No. 8 (180)
- Nhân dân. (2017). Tuyên bố chung Việt Nam - Trung Quốc [China - Vietnam Joint Declaration]. *Nhân dân*. <https://nhandan.vn/tuyen-bo-chung-viet-nam-trung-quoc-post309290.html>, accessed March 27, 2024.
- Quang Trịnh. (2022). Tầm nhìn '100 năm' lần thứ 2 của Đảng Cộng sản Trung Quốc [The 2nd '100 Years' Vision of the Communist Party of China]. *Truyền hình Quốc hội Việt Nam*. <https://quochoitv.vn/tam-nhin-100-nam-lan-thu-2-cua-dang-cong-san-trung-quoc>, accessed March 27, 2024.
- Reuters. (2022). Putin asserts strong, sovereign Russia against sanctions 'blitzkrieg'. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/putin-dismisses-stupid-western-sanctions-blitzkrieg-2022-06-17/>, accessed March 27, 2024.
- Sadhavi Chauhan. (2013). Russia-Vietnam cooperation in the Asia Pacific. *Observer Research Foundation*. <http://www.orfonline.org/research/russia-vietnam-cooperation-in-the-asia-pacific/>, accessed March 27, 2024.
- Stephanie Pezard. (2022). *U.S. Strategic Competition with Russia*. RAND Cooperation.
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. (2015). Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's interview with the Channel NewsAsia, Kuala Lumpur, 5 August 2015. *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*. [http://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/foreign\\_policy/news/-/asset\\_publisher/ckNonkJE02Bw/content/id/1635121](http://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/ckNonkJE02Bw/content/id/1635121), accessed March 27, 2024.
- The State council. (2016). China Adheres to the Position of Settling Through Negotiation the Relevant Disputes Between China and the Philippines in the South China Sea. *The State council - The people's Republic of China*. [http://english.gov.cn/state\\_council/ministries/2016/07/13/content\\_281475392503075.htm](http://english.gov.cn/state_council/ministries/2016/07/13/content_281475392503075.htm), accessed March 27, 2024.
- The White House. (2017). *National security strategy of the United States of America*. The White House, USA.
- The White House. (2018). Remarks by Vice President Pence at the 2018 APEC CEO Summit Port Moresby/ Papua New Guinea. *the White House*. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-vice-president-pence-2018-apec-ceo-summit-port-moresby-papua-new-guinea/>, accessed March 27, 2024.
- The White House. (2022). *National Security Strategy*. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>
- The White House. (2023). Remarks by President Biden at a Campaign Reception. *The White House*, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2023/08/10/remarks-by-president-biden-at-a-campaign-reception-salt-lake-city-ut/>, accessed March 27, 2024.
- The National Institute for Defense Studies. (2022). *The New Normal of Great Power Competition: The U.S.-China-Russia Relationship and the Indo-Pacific Region*. NIDS International Symposium on Security Affairs 2022, The National Institute for Defense Studies, Japan
- US Congress. (2018). S.2736 - Asia Reassurance Initiative Act of 2018. *US Congress*. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/senate-bill/2736/text#toc-HBC83E05F3CB54A088207211061CF43FA>, accessed March 27, 2024.
- US Department of Defense. (2019). *The Indo - Pacific strategy report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region*. US The Department of Defense, pp.7-10.
- US Department of Defense. (2018). Summary of the National Defense Strategy. *US Department of Defense*. <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>.
- VOV. (2021). Trung Quốc tuyên bố hoàn thành mục tiêu 100 năm lần thứ nhất [China announced that it had completed its first 100-year goal]. *VOV*, <https://vov.vn/the-gioi/trung-quoc-tuyen-bo-hoan-thanh-muc-tieu-100-nam-lan-thu-nhat-870419.vov>, accessed March 27, 2024.



#### Author biography

**Pham Thi Yen (Yen, P.T)**, holding a Ph.D. in International Relations from VNU University of Social Sciences and Humanities in Hanoi, currently serves as a Head of International Relations Department at Faculty of Oriental Studies, Van Hien University. Before March 2024, she worked as a Lecturer and Secretary of the Science and Training Council at Ho Chi Minh City University of Foreign Languages – Information Technology (HUFLIT), a member of the Editorial Board of HUFLIT Journal of Science and leads the International Relations Research Group. Furthermore, she acts as a visiting lecturer at various universities in Southern Vietnam, teaching at both undergraduate and graduate levels. Specializing in defense cooperation, external relations of major countries, and Vietnam's external relations with major countries, Yen has authored two books (Vietnamese): "Cam Ranh Bay in Vietnam's external relations (2002 – 2018)" and "Vietnam's defense diplomacy with Major Powers in the 21st century: Strategic balance in the context of geopolitical competition in the Indo-Pacific region". She has also contributed book chapters in both Vietnamese and English. Yen's articles have been published in reputable journals such as *Strategic Analysis*, *Thammasat Review* and *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs*, among other prestigious journals.