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## DEVELOPMENTS OF VIETNAM'S POLICIES TOWARDS AUSTRALIA AFTER THE COLD WAR<sup>1</sup>

Pham Thi Huyen Trang<sup>2</sup>, Tran Ngoc Dung<sup>3</sup>

**Abstract.** This paper investigates Vietnam's primary documents of Vietnamese Communist Party and Vietnamese government relating to diplomatic strategy to present the improvement and development of Vietnam's policies towards Australia after the Cold War. In the context that Vietnam was embargoed and isolated in the region, Australia was an important bridge to help Vietnam to link with foreign countries. Due to the significance of Australia in both economy, politics, diplomacy, and recently security, Vietnam's policies towards Australia are remarkable with great expectations and the bilateral relation between the two strong partners more and more obtains better results.

**Key words:** Vietnam-Australia relationship, Vietnam's foreign policy, strategic partnership, Asia-Pacific region

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## ПОЛИТИКА ВЬЕТНАМА В ОТНОШЕНИИ АВСТРАЛИИ ПОСЛЕ ХОЛОДНОЙ ВОЙНЫ<sup>4</sup>

Фам Тхи Хюен Чанг<sup>5</sup>, Чан Нгок Зунг<sup>6</sup>

**Аннотация:** В данной работе исследуются дипломатические документы Коммунистической партии Вьетнама и правительства СРВ, дающие представление о политике Вьетнама в отношении Австралии после холодной войны. В условиях эмбарго и изоляции Вьетнама в регионе Австралия оказала ему ценную помощь в налаживании связей с зарубежными странами. В связи со значением Австралии для Вьетнама в сферах экономики, политики, дипломатии, а в последнее время и безопасности на развитие вьетнамо-австралийских отношений возлагаются большие надежды.

**Ключевые слова:** вьетнамо-австралийские отношения, внешняя политика Вьетнама, стратегическое партнерство, Азиатско-Тихоокеанский регион

<sup>1</sup> This research is funded by Tan Trao University in Tuyen Quang, Vietnam.

<sup>2</sup> Pham Thi Huyen Trang, Ph.D., Lecturer, Tan Trao University, Vietnam. Email: trangsp1987@gmail.com

<sup>3</sup> Tran Ngoc Dung – corresponding author, Ph.D., Lecturer, Institute of International Relations, Ho Chi Minh Academy of Politics. ORCID: 0000-0001-9631-1097. Email: tranngocdung.hcma@gmail.com

<sup>4</sup> Это исследование финансируется Университетом Танчао, Туенкуанг, Вьетнам.

<sup>5</sup> Фам Тхи Хюен Чанг, к. н., преподаватель, Университет Танчао, Вьетнам. Email: trangsp1987@gmail.com

<sup>6</sup> Чан Нгок Зунг, к. н., преподаватель, Институт международных отношений, Государственная политическая академия Хо Ши Мина, Вьетнам. ORCID: 0000-0001-9631-1097. Email: tranngocdung.hcma@gmail.com

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### **Introduction**

In 2023, Vietnam and Australia celebrate 50 years of diplomatic relations (1973–2023). This relation witnessed various changes with effects of the Cold War, the problems in Cambodia (1979–1989) and from 1991, it developed remarkably as both Vietnam and Australia deeply appreciated this relation. Especially, after the Cold War, as Vietnam recognised the need to open the country and to establish diplomatic relations with foreign partners, Australia was considered as an important bridge to help Vietnam to connect with Western world. This paper studies primary materials relating to Vietnam's diplomatic strategy and documents of the Communist Party of Vietnam to show the changes of Vietnam's foreign policy in general and the importance of Australia in Vietnam's viewpoint in particular. This paper argues that Australia has played more and more significant role in Vietnam's diplomatic strategy and the bilateral relations have developed strongly, especially after the Comprehensive Partnership was declared in 2009 and the Strategic Partnership in 2018. Being a middle power, Australia provides Vietnam more opportunity and experience to deal with political and diplomatic conflicts in the region and becomes potential market for Vietnamese economy. As a result, Vietnam's policies to Australia are more positive and remarkable in various subjects of politics, economy, and security.

### **Vietnam's policies towards Australia (1991–2009)**

The 6<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) (1986); the withdrawal of Vietnamese soldiers from Cambodia in 1989 and 1991 Paris Peace Agreements created a new environment for Vietnam to change its foreign policy. Politburo Resolution No. 32 (7/1986) stated that Vietnam should make “peaceful coexistence” with China, America and ASEAN [Elliot 2012]. Politburo Resolution No. 13 dated 20/5/1988 tended to multidirectional foreign policy and created “more friends, less enemies”. Resolution No. 13 can be seen as a major landmark of Vietnam's foreign policy under Doi Moi (renovation). Vietnam's foreign policy transferred from focusing on the differences between socialist and capitalist ideologies to paying attention to national interest [Thayer & Amer 1999: 1]. This strategy created a foundation and new environment for Vietnamese general foreign policies, including policies towards Australia. The 7<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 1991 called for the diversification and multilateralization in foreign policy and relation towards countries and international organisations. The Political Report of Vietnam Communist Party stated that “we stand for equal and mutually beneficial co-operation with all countries regardless of different socio-political systems and on the basis of the principle of peaceful co-existence” [Văn kiện Đại hội...1991: 134]. Vietnam focused on building relations with Southeast Asian countries in particular, and countries in the Asia-Pacific region in general. By doing this, Vietnam's diplomatic relations grew from 23 non-communist countries in 1989 to 163 ones by 1995 [Le Hong Hiep, Tsvetov 2018: 27]. In the first time, Vietnam had diplomatic relations with all 5 permanent members of United Nations Security Council in 1995. Diplomacy became a key channel to develop economy and society, and Vietnam's open-door policy created opportunities for the move towards socialism.

By 2001, the 9<sup>th</sup> Congress of Vietnamese Communist Party stated that “Vietnam is willing to befriend and a reliable partner to all nations” [Văn kiện Đại hội...2001: 119]. Politburo Resolution in

11/2001 about Vietnam's diplomatic strategy sketched that Vietnam "continues to strengthen relations with its neighbors and countries that have been traditional friends, give importance to relations with big countries, developing countries, and the political and economic centers of the world" [Vũ Dương Ninh 2002: 110]. This is the first time Vietnam declared publicly the term "partner of cooperation" in the foreign policy and it was "anyone who respects Vietnam's independence and sovereignty, establishes and expands friendly, equal, and mutually beneficial relations with Vietnam" [Le Hong Hiep, Tsvetov 2018: 31]. As such, Vietnam was in the active, proactive positions to build and improve the relations with other countries for the strategic developments of both sides. Vietnam changed in both diplomatic thinking and methods. Until the 10<sup>th</sup> Congress, CPV's foreign policy opinions were reaffirmed that Vietnam "actively and positively integrates international economy, together with expands international cooperation in other areas. Vietnam is friend, reliable partner of all world community, actively engages in the process of regional and international cooperation" [Văn kiện Đại hội...2006: 38]. In brief through around 20 years, Vietnam renovated foreign policy thinking gradually, from the worldview of "anti-capitalism" to "diversification" and "multidirectionalization". This strategy thus effected Vietnam's foreign policy towards Australia as Vietnam was under American trade embargo and Vietnam needed a gate to open the country and connect with capitalist community.

Regarding Australia, the 6<sup>th</sup> Congress of CPV stated that "our (Vietnam) government undertakings enhance and expand the friendship relations with Sweden, Switzerland, France, Australia and Japan and other Western countries under the principles of equality and mutual benefit [Văn kiện Đại hội...1987: 108]. Under the Foreign Policy Renovation, Canberra government was recognized as Vietnam's potential partner as Australia maintained a friendship relation with Vietnam after 1973, discussed with Vietnam to find political solution for Cambodia and wanted to encourage Vietnam to join ASEAN. From Vietnam's perspective, Australia was a bridge to help Vietnam establish and expand the relations with countries in the Asia- Pacific region. Australia played a role of a middle power, who did not compete directly with other powers in the region but was an intermediary to address regional conflicts, and contributed to regional peace, stability and development [Chia 2000; Malcolm 2020]. The role of Australia is suitable for Vietnam's diplomatic aim and foreign policy and therefore encourages Vietnam to improve the bilateral relation in the context of regional and international conflicts.

The improvement of Vietnam's foreign policy to Australia is presented by more and more diplomatic visits of Vietnamese governmental leaders to Australia. From 1993 to 2009, 13 high-level leaders from Vietnam visited Canberra, including Party General Secretary, President, Prime Minister, National Assembly Chairman, Vice President, Vice Prime Minister. The visit of Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet in 1993 created the first turning point in the relation between Australia and Vietnam as it "completed an active and positive diplomatic strategy" to help "to link a friendship circle of West Pacific region, from North East Asia to South East Asia and go further to South Pacific" [Nguyễn Xuân Thắng 1996: 20]. The formal visits of the two Party General Secretaries Do Muoi (7/1995) and Nong Duc Manh (9/2009) created landmark changes and development in the Vietnam's foreign policy towards Australia, and the developments of Vietnam-Australian relations. That Party General Secretary Do Muoi went to Canberra was a key visit of Vietnamese Communist Party's official leader to a capitalist country in the context that America and Western countries-maintained trade embargo to Vietnam. This visit therefore shows the changes of both Vietnamese and Australian foreign policy thinking for their national interests. Many cooperating documents were signed in this visit to develop Vietnam's manufacture, industry and living standard. Hanoi highly evaluated the necessity of

Australia in Vietnam's foreign policy and wanted to enhance the bilateral relation with Canberra. Especially, in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century and after Vietnam joined the WTO in 2007, many Vietnamese leaders visited Australia to enhance the relation: President Nguyen Minh Triet (10/2007), Vice-Prime Minister Nguyen Thien Nhan (2/2008), National Assembly Chairman Nguyen Phu Trong (3/2008), Vice-Prime Minister Truong Vinh Trong (5/2008) and Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung (10/2008). The year 2008 was also ceremony of 35 years of the bilateral relations and a series of visits from Vietnam can be seen as its efforts to improve the relations. This is an excellent preparation for the enhancement of Vietnam-Australian relation to Comprehensive Partner in 2009.

Vietnam's White Paper of Defense in 1998 stated that "the Asia-Pacific region is interested for peace... There is no conflict between countries [in the region]; all countries try to improve counter-relations for their development" [Việt Nam củng cố... 1998: 8–9]. However, it did not mention directly Australia as a partner in security and defense cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region as economic development and relation were Vietnam's major target. Until 1998, the two countries launched a "Regional Security Dialogue". In 1999, first Vietnam's military medical officers visited Australia to learn methods of preventing malaria. In 2000, Vietnam formally sent military attaché to Canberra. Those actions show that bilateral defense cooperation was at early step and Vietnam was not willing to expand relation with Canberra after the Cold War.

From the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, Vietnam's defense policy changed as Vietnam was willing to cooperate with other countries in security and other areas for national interests. In 2007, the Vietnamese Communist Party issued Resolution No. 09 namely "Vietnam's Sea Strategy through 2020" to recognize the role of sea and ocean in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the desire to enhance naval power until 2020 due to the pressure from China's expansion of naval power in Asia. From this change, Vietnam started to have detail military cooperation with Australia. In 2003, Deputy Minister of Ministry of Defense Phung Quang Thanh visited Canberra to discuss the defense-security bilateral cooperation. However, in this period, the trend of operation was mostly that Vietnam sent soldiers and experts to Australia for learning and there was no military dialogue or arm-trade. For example, in November 2005, for the first time two Vietnamese military officers took part in the training course for all foreign military observers at Australia [Aoi, Heng 2014: 232]. Until 2009, Vietnam sent 215 military officers to Australia for training.

Regarding economy and commerce, Vietnam considered Australia as a gate to help Vietnam to connect with Western countries and then go beyond political differences to achieve national interests. Australia was also viewed as country to provide Vietnam with knowledge, modern technology, new and effective experience and management to renovate and open the country after 1986. In this period, Vietnam's main policy was to improve economic cooperation and exploit Australian supports to help Vietnam to obtain criteria and demands of global production economy. Especially, Vietnam considered Australia as a supporter during the process Vietnam wanted to join WTO. In 2006, the two countries completed bilateral negotiations about condition for Vietnam to join WTO. In return, Australia also considered Vietnam as a potential market and economic partner. As a result, Vietnam and Australia signed a series of agreements to support their economic and investment cooperation. They are Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreement (1990), Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (1991), Double Taxation Agreement (1992), and Air Services Agreement (1995). Due to those economic and trade agreements, the interactions between Vietnam and Australia increased strongly. Vietnam's exportation to Australia raised quickly: from USD 79 million (1991–92) to USD 1.726 billion (1999–2000). In 2000, Australia became the 3<sup>rd</sup> exported market of Vietnam, took 9,1% of Vietnam's export turnover, in which oil was the most important production (Australian

Bureau Statistics 2001). Vietnam also sought to change the ratio and structure of exportation to Australia, but the main productions were still raw materials and oil [Phạm Nguyên Minh, Phùng Thị Vân Kiều 2015: 78]. Trading between Vietnam and Australia raised to USD 5.747 billion in 2008 [Huynh Tam Sang 2018: 95].

Regarding investment, Vietnam's policy is to attract both FDI and ODA from Australia. Law of Foreign Investment, one of the most open laws about investment in the Asia-Pacific region, was issued in 1987 and it created advantageous environments for foreign companies to invest in Vietnam [Nguyễn Xuân Oánh 2001]. This Law was adopted in 1996 to create more opportunities for international enterprises to invest in Vietnam. With that policy, Australian FDI and ODA grew strongly played significant in Vietnam's development, helping Vietnam to pay expired debts for IMF, and created necessary conditions for World Bank and Asian Development Bank to re-provide money for Vietnam in 1993 [Đặng Phong, Trần Đình Thiên 2012: 346]. In 1994, Australia became the 4<sup>th</sup> largest investor of Vietnam [Nguyen Thi Thuy Hang 2019: 68]. Australian investment in Vietnam focused on oil, material extraction, manufactures, finance, food service. Until 2008-2009, Australian ODA for Vietnam achieved at USD 93.1 million [Australian Government 2008: 44]. One of the most noticeable examples for success of Australian financial aid in Vietnam was the My Thuan Bridge to connect Ho Chi Minh City with West South provinces. It was built from 1995 to 2000 in a project at AUD 103.39 million (or USD 91 million) [Đặng Phong, Trần Đình Thiên 2012: 526–527]. This was a lasting symbol of the close and enduring relationship between Australia and Vietnam [Nguyen Thi Thuy Hang 2019: 68].

With the policy to enhance the relation with Australia, in 2009, Hanoi and Canberra declared Comprehensive Partnership, which reaffirmed the bilateral interaction between the two countries, especially in political and economic dimensions. Both sides tried to settle “a clear framework to strength the bilateral relationship” with mutual cooperation in 6 major areas of political engagement, economic and commercial ties, development assistance, technological cooperation, defense and security, people-to-people ties, regional and global issues. From then, Vietnamese policies towards Australia also changed and adopted as the bilateral relation was improved to higher level. The improvement of Vietnam-Australian relations presents Vietnam's strong desire for multilateralization and diversification in foreign policy, and the high position of Australia in Vietnam's foreign policy.

#### **Vietnam's policy towards Australia (2009–2022)**

After the declaration of Comprehensive Partnership in 2009, the bilateral relation between Vietnam and Australia grew strongly, and Vietnam's diplomatic policy to Australia adopt and had positive changes as in only 9 years, the relationship was again improved to Strategic Partnership in 2018. After 25 years of renovation, Vietnam's relations with foreign countries not only focused on economy but also expanded to political area, culture, security, and defense. Recently, the 13<sup>th</sup> Congress of CPV impressed that Vietnam would “improve and enhance bilateral relations with partners, especially with Strategic Partners, Comprehensive Partners, and other significant Partners [Văn kiện Đại hội...2021: 162]. From 2018, Australia became one of 17 Vietnam's Strategic Partners and therefore it was under Vietnam's priority to build, maintain and enhance the relation. Because the Asia-Pacific region, including Southeast Asia was more and more significant strategic geography, and recently became competitive region between major powers, that Vietnam evaluated high-position of Australia in foreign policy is suitable with Vietnam's aims of improving regional cooperation [Ibid: 107].



The Declaration of Vietnam – Australia Comprehensive Partnership in 2009 was noticeable example for the development of the bilateral relation between the two countries and the importance of Australia in Vietnam's foreign policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. From 2009 onwards, Vietnam's policy is to enhance the comprehensive relations with Australia in various areas. In the visit of Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung to Canberra in 2015, the two countries declared to enhance the bilateral relation, especial in major areas of politics, defense and security, economy, investment, trade, information technology, development cooperation, science, agriculture, transformation, and education. Vietnam and Australia also signed the Plan of Action (2016–2019) with 4 key points to improving the bilateral relation and via East Asia Summit, APEC [Nguyen Thi Thuy Hang 2019: 71]. The development of Vietnam's foreign policy towards Australia was reaffirmed in 2018 as the two countries declared the Strategic Partnership and focused on 3 key operating areas of enhancing economic engagement, deepening strategic, defense and security cooperation, and building knowledge and innovation partnerships [Australian Government: 20.12.2022].

The improvement of Vietnam's foreign policy to Australia was also presented clearly by formal visits of Vietnamese leaders to Australia in the period 2009–2022. They are visits of Vice-Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc (4/2012), Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung (3/2015), Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc (3/2018), Vice-President Dang Thi Ngoc Thinh (4/2018), Minister of Defense Ngo Xuan Lich (11/2018). It seems that Vietnam tends to expand the relation with Australia in various methods with the involvement of Communist Party, of Government, of National Assembly, provinces and people.

Regarding security and defense cooperation, Vietnam's key aims were to exploit Australian advantages to balance major powers and to maintain peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region. In 2009, the Vietnam's White Paper of Defense judged that “the Asia-Pacific region with developed and dynamic economies are becoming the more and more significant region of the world where attracts the attention and competition of major powers.... This is also a region with defense and security challenges... This region also faces with negative influences of non-traditional security challenges” [Quốc phòng Việt Nam 2009: 14–15]. From that viewpoint, Vietnam's security and defense policies were to “enhance the understand and belief between people and governments of different countries, create foundation for expanding cooperation, address arguments to prevent and roll-back risks of conflicts, partly contribute to maintain peaceful, stable environment in the region and the world.... Vietnam is willing to cooperate with countries...to serve peace and operation of all countries without discrimination of political system [Ibid: 21–22]. The 12<sup>th</sup> Congress of CPV in 2012 identified that sea and territorial conflicts in the Asia-Pacific region were complex and tensive; and Vietnam needed to modernize military ability to protect national sovereignty and independence [Văn kiện Đại hội...2016]. The Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc issued “Overall strategy for international integration through 2020, vision to 2030” to state that Vietnam “conducts all agreements, cooperation programs about defense, security with powers including Russia, America, India, Japan and other potential partners such as Australia and Israel [Thủ tướng Chính phủ 2016: 18]. As such, Vietnam considered Australia as “a potential partner” in defense and security cooperation as there were more and more conflicts and competitions in the Asia-Pacific region. White Paper of Defense in 2019 re-stated that Vietnam was facing various challenges in the Asia-Pacific region and Vietnam needed to cooperate actively, positively, responsibly, and effectively with multi-partners via Dialogues, Frameworks, Meetings in the India-Pacific region [Quốc phòng Việt Nam 2019: 13]. Although most Vietnam's defense documents do not mention Australia directly, but they show the main focus on the

Asia-Pacific region and then India-Pacific one, in which Australia played a relative role to maintain peace and stability.

As Australia is a middle-power as Korea, Israel, this country has similar strategic aims with Vietnam in both defense and security and therefore Vietnam wants to improve the Vietnamese-Australian sea security relation [Ton Duc Anh 2018: 28]. Defense cooperation after 2009 has considered than that of the period 1991–2009 as there were annual discussions and meetings between Ministers of Defense of the two countries. In fact, the two countries established formal defense relation in 1998 and in 2010, Hanoi and Canberra signed an agreement on defense cooperation to focus on peacekeeping, transnational crime, aviation, and maritime security [Ibid: 29]. Australia therefore provided various types of training for Vietnamese soldiers and military officers, of which 1.500 ones learned English from 1998 [Ibid: 28]. Because Australia and Vietnam shared values of sea-freedom, international and regional security, Australia can provide Vietnam with experiences about defense and security, military knowledge via training courses for military officers to help Vietnam to build military industry [Grossman 2020: 52]. Especially, via Australia, Vietnam can enhance the relation with America in balancing with the growth of China [Huỳnh Tâm Sáng 2017: 31]. In 8/2017, Minister of Defense Ngo Xuan Lich met Minister for Defense of Australia Marise Payne to evaluate results and successes of the bilateral relations between the two countries via ARF, ADMM, and EAS. In this meeting, Vietnam wanted to have Australian supports to improve Vietnamese naval and military abilities. In 10/2018, Vietnam and Australia agreed to launch the Strategic Dialogue 2+2 with the involvement of leaders of Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Vietnam warmly welcomed the appearance of Australian Naval ships such as HMAS Anzac, Toowoomba and Success in 2018, or HMAS in 2019. As such, Vietnam highly evaluated the importance of Australia in defense and security cooperation in the context of growing disagreements and conflicts in the Asia-Pacific region.

Regarding economy and trade, Vietnam's strategy concentrated on "building and reinforcing strategic partners to develop markets unshakably, combine short-term benefit and national interests, economic and political, diplomatic interests; be active and independent and autonomic in international economic integration" [Thủ tướng Chính phủ 2011: 1]. In detail, due to this strategy until 2020 Asia took around 46% of Vietnam's trade, Europe got 20%, America obtained 25%, Oceania got 4%, and Africa took 5% [Nguyễn Xuân Thiện 2011: 3]. Orientation for Vietnam's exportation to Australia in the period 2011–2020 was: 1) expanding exportation and improving the quality of commodities; 2) transferring the ratio of exportation, improving industrial productions with high value; 3) reducing exportation of raw materials [Ibid: 2]. With that strategy, Vietnam has been one of Australia's fastest-growing trading partners in recent years and the two-way trade between Australia and Vietnam in 2022 grew around 27 per cent on the previous year to around USD 23.5 billion, elevating Australia to be Vietnam's 7th largest trading partner with Vietnam now Australia's 10th largest trading partner [Vietnam – Australia: 25.09.2023].

Regarding investment, Vietnam called and welcomed Australian companies to join Vietnam's market. Vietnam's government sought to attract both FDI and ODA from Australia and considered those investment as a significant channel to develop the bilateral relations. Australia invested in industry, services, education. During 2022–2023, Australia has committed to provide AUD 92.9 million (USD 63.1 million) in ODA for Vietnam. As of January 20, 2023, Australian investors poured a consolidated capital of USD 1.97 billion into 584 projects, ranking 20th among 141 countries and territories with capital in the country. The majority of investment capital from Australia is in the

processing and manufacturing industry (47.2 per cent), with steel producer BlueScope leading this industry and also the biggest Australian investor in Vietnam [Australian funds...: 02.03.2023].

Vietnam also sought to improve trade with Australia via multi-organizations or dialogues. Through ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (AANZFTA – signed in 2010), Vietnam got advantages in trade with Australia. In 2017, Vietnam was a part of TPP and then CPTPP which helped to increase trade with Australia and other countries in the Pacific Ocean such as Japan, Canada, New Zealand, Singapore. Recently, RCEP was signed in 2021 between ASEAN and Australia, China, Japan, Korea and New Zealand also created more opportunities for Vietnam's trade with Australia. As a result, Vietnam exports to Australia raised from USD 190 million (1995) to 5.52 billion (2022). In return, Vietnam's imports from Australia raised from USD 110 million (1995) to 10.11 billion (2022) [Trading Economics: 30.11.2023].

### **Conclusions**

If before 1991 Vietnam's foreign policy to Australia was affected by viewpoint of "cold war" with ideologist differences, the Renovation in 1986 gradually changed Vietnam's policy to Canberra and the Vietnam-Australian relations. With open door policy and direction of "more friends, less enemies", together with strategies of diversification and multidirectionalization, Vietnam gradually built new policy in the bilateral relation with Australia. Because Canberra government was considered as Vietnam's gate to connect with Western countries, Vietnamese Communist Party and Vietnam's government quickly settled friendship with Australia after the Cold War ended in 1989 and the Paris agreement about Cambodian issue was signed in 1991. In the context of embargo from America and other capitalist countries, Vietnam considered that economy and trade were the key areas in relation with Australia to resolve the economic crisis. From 1991, economic interaction received high attention from Vietnam and it achieved the most successful result in comparison with other subjects. In the period 1991–2009, defense and security were little mentioned in the bilateral relation as Vietnam's main aim was to develop economy. Vietnam's viewpoint gradually changed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with China's rising power in Asia and regional peace, stability and sea-freedom were threatened. It is noticeable that Vietnam's foreign policy to Australia was more comprehensive due to shared concerns about China's power in Asia and the necessity of each other in unshakeable development. In the period 2009–2022, political and defense relations developed constantly and the two countries sought to build a "truly strategic cooperation" [Nguyen Thi Thuy Hang 2019: 76]. Not only obtaining military knowledge from Australia, Vietnam got experiences, personnel and weapon supports to build arm-industry in the context of conflict and of both traditional and non-traditional challenges.

Remarkably, Vietnam enhanced quickly and strongly the relations with Australia in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The two countries started a formal relationship in 1973 and in the period 1973-1990, this relation was quite small with the main content that Australia supported and invested into Vietnam to recover economy and address refugees and other social problems. After the Cold War, with different political ideology, Vietnam firstly focused on trade with Australia and limited defense cooperation. Although Hanoi increased the relation with Canberra, but because Australia was a middle-power, it was not necessary to improve the level of this relationship quickly. Therefore, it takes 36 years from 1973 to 2009 to upgrade to Comprehensive Partner. However, it needs only 9 years to enhance the relation to Strategic Partnership (2018). Two milestones not only reflect the development of the Vietnam-Australian bilateral relation but also present the more and more importance of Australia in Vietnam's foreign policy in recent years. Vietnam's position in the international relation has changed



and this effected Vietnam's foreign policy to Australia. From 1991 to 2000, Vietnam wanted to be friends with other countries, in the early 2000s Vietnam was partner of international countries, but in the 2010s Vietnam was active and responsible partner. Recently, with changes of international relations, especially the competition in the Asia-Pacific region, Vietnam needs Australia and other countries to develop economy, education, science and technology, and even military ability. Therefore, it is not surprising that Vietnam's foreign policy to Australia adopted for strong and deep bilateral relation in short period. Vietnam-Australian cooperation is not only for their mutual benefit, but also for the security and development of the Asia-Pacific region.

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