

## Strategic Adjustment of Powers for Asia-Pacific Region and Its Impact on Vietnam

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**ABSTRACT:-** With its inherent geographical features, large population size and unlimited economic development potential, the Asia-Pacific region is gradually replacing Europe - Atlantic Ocean and rising to become the global geopolitical center. Whether the future of the world being in peace or at war, stability or confusion is increasingly determined by the geopolitical situation of the Asia-Pacific region. Most of the world powers focus on this region. This article analyzes strategic adjustment of powers for the Asia-Pacific region and shows its impact on Vietnam, thence, it proposes foreign policy to Vietnam.

**Keywords:** - Asia-Pacific, power, strategic adjustment, Vietnam.

### I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the Asia-Pacific, with the largest population in the world, is becoming a dynamically developing region with important position of geopolitics, geo-economic and security in the world.

In terms of natural geography, the Asia-Pacific region includes Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, Central Asia, South Asia, group of islands in the Pacific and perimeter of countries in the South North American region with its total population being up to nearly 4 billion people, accounting for more than half of the world population.

Today, Asia Pacific has expanded up to 50 countries with total population reached 4 billions people. This figure is 8 to 10 times higher than European Union. Among 50 countries, there are some拥有 a large area and world highest population such as Russia, China, United States, India, and Indonesia. This area is also a potential region for military. Regarding politics, Asia Pacific has 3 of 5 countries, who are standing member of the United Nations, are China, United States and Russia.

From the economic perspective, GDP of 21 country member of APEC has accounted 50% of GDP and 40% of global commercial service<sup>1</sup>.

The inherent geographical features, large population size and unlimited economic development potential are the decisive factors for the Asia-Pacific region to replace the European - Atlantic Ocean region to become the global geopolitical center.

### 1. Contents

#### 1.1. Strategic adjustment of powers for the Asia-Pacific region

The 21<sup>st</sup> century is forecast to be "Century of Asia-Pacific"<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, most of the world powers focus on adjustment in the strategy for this particularly important region; such as the United States, Russia, China, France, Japan and India.

<sup>1</sup>Department of Foreign Affairs of Ho Chi Minh City, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam (2019, August 19). *Overview of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation and Vietnam's participation*. Retrieved from <http://www.mofahcm.gov.vn/vi/mofa/nr091019080134/nr091019085342/nr091019085619/nr091028145119/ns140321053327>

<sup>2</sup>Former Minister of Foreign Affairs Hillary Clinton. (2011, October 11). "America's Pacific Century", Foreign Policy Magazine.

### ***Adjustment in the strategy of the United States***

With tremendous changes in the world situation and the Asia-Pacific region, the United States has made remarkable adjustments in the strategy, especially since early 2011, the American military and diplomatic 'pivot,' or 'rebalance' toward Asia became a popular buzzword after Hillary Clinton authored America's Pacific Century, in Foreign Policy.

Since taking over the power, although the President Donald Trump has denied the strategy of "rebalancing" by the predecessor, the United States still values the region and maintains Its interest toward the region, which is presented on all three sides of politics, economics, and security - defense. The deployment of Free and Open Indo- Pacific strategy (FOIP) has affirmed the crucial position of the Asia-Pacific region in the US global strategy<sup>3</sup>.

President Trump's administration has revealed the basic features of the objectives, geographical scope, and intension of the FOIP strategy. Regarding the objectives, the strategy is aimed at controlling growth of China and protecting status of the US in regional order. Geographically, the strategy is based on the "interconnection" between the Indian and Pacific Ocean, identifying a large area of over 80 million square kilometers including the Indian Ocean region in the east of the African coast and the Pacific Ocean on the west coast of the United States. Regarding intension, the strategy is based on two values of "free" and "open". Accordingly, "free" is expressed on two levels: at the international level, countries are not forced, imposed; and at the national level, individuals are not suppressed and enjoy good governance. "Open" in this strategy means that maritime routes are not controlled or blocked by any power and a free and equal trading system is maintained.

### ***Adjustment in the strategy of Russia***

By studying The Russian leaders' thinking development since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, it can be affirmed that adjustment in the strategy of Russia for Asia is not just a situated or temporary strategic adjustment to deal with the United States and Western countries, but it expresses a Eastern strategy, also known as "pivot" toward Asia since Russian President V. Putintook over the power in 2000. In 2010, one year before Obama's administration announced its strategy of pivot/rebalancing for Asia, President Vladimir Putin announced that Russia would "turn East": from then, Moscow committed to strengthen their participation in Economic, politic and security situation in Asian country.

Basic principles in foreign policy of Russia are to strengthen cooperation with Asia-Pacific countries to balance forces with Western countries. Russia focuses on improving and developing bilateral and multilateral relations with Asia-Pacific countries, values strategic partnerships with China, Vietnam and India, focuses on economic sectors, trade, military techniques, on the principle of respect for independence, sovereignty, equality and mutual benefit. Russia advocates to the establishment of a Northeast Asian security negotiation mechanism, including North Korea, South Korea, the United States, Japan, China and Russia and taking this mechanism to establish a collective security space for the Asia-Pacific region. On the other hand, Russia continues to maintain and give prominence to the role of its military forces in the region, focuses on modernizing the military; in which priority is given to military forces stationed in the Far East, first of all is the islands of Kuril, where disputes are taking place with Japan.

### ***Adjustment in the strategy of China***

Adjustment in the strategy of China related to Asia-Pacific is reflected in its external policy, the strategy of "one belt, one road" and its adjustment of defense strategy.

The adjustment of external policy of China is quite evident in the view that all countries in the world are partners and are divided into 4 groups due to their priority and importance for China, in both economically and politically. Within partner countries, China focuses on the two objects in which Nearby countries and thriving countries. China focuses on neighboring diplomatic relations with six areas including Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, West Asia and the South Pacific. In specific relations with great countries, China depends on the provision of "level of intimacy", the "level of dedication" of each country with China's interests to have adaptive policies.

In September 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed a strategic initiative "one belt, one road" (the economic belt "the silk road" and "Marine silk road in 21<sup>st</sup> century")<sup>4</sup>. Noticeably, in 2014, China introduced a "new Asian security perspective" to seek its key role in the regional security system. Accordingly, China advocates "Asian works need to rely on Asian people to solve". This policy differs from previous claims that "the Pacific Ocean is wide enough to accept both China and the United States."

<sup>3</sup>The White House. (2017). *Remarks by President Trump at APEC CEO Summit, Da Nang, Viet Nam*. Retrieved from <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-apec-ceo-summit-da-nang-vietnam/>

<sup>4</sup>Communist Party of China. (2013, November). *Resolution of Plenum 3 courses XVIII*.

China has also adjusted its defense strategy. Accordingly, on May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015, China officially announced the Defense White Paper, most clearly showing its national defense strategy in a new historical period, shifting from the period of "hiding and waiting for chance" to carry out "Chinese dream" of becoming a power in the world<sup>5</sup>.

#### ***Adjustment in the strategy of France***

Asia was a "forgotten area" by France for a long time after World War II, when Paris focused on building Europe, targeting its neighbors and considering the African region as priority in external policy. However, in the context of the Asia-Pacific region increasingly becoming the center and growth motivation of the global economy, Paris has changed its mind and started planning to turn to Asia in 2012.

Since taking over the power in 2012, President François Hollande has shown a desire to establish a more evident and diverse presence of France in the Asia-Pacific, despite having to compete directly with the US, this nation is pushing the strategy toward this region to limit influence of China. White paper about national defense and security of France in 2013 gave a priority to Asia region and called upon France to increase its engagement in this continent<sup>6</sup>.

The fundamental objective of the pivot policy on Asia by France is to find its strategic position in this area, in other words, the position of France with status and being listened to. However, "pivot to Asia" is not a movement effect, but because France wants to be present in a region where the future world is being built<sup>7</sup>. The idea of pivot of France is not the same as the "pivot" or "rebalancing" policy in Asia-Pacific of the US deployed in 2011 under President Barack Obama. The focus of "pivot" of France is not accompanied by military restructuring in the region but mainly on economic and diplomatic activities. Specifically, the pivot policy of France focuses on solving two main issues: the first is to find new commercial markets; the second is to diversify and deepen strategic partnerships in the Asia-Pacific region.

#### ***Adjustment in the strategy of Japan***

As early as 1993, Japan proposed an Asia-Pacific policy in the new era which is called "Miyazawa Doctrine". Since then, the next administrations in Japan have basically pursued this doctrine for the Asia-Pacific region; however, there have been also some adjustments to accommodate the new situation. Japan's basic view is that in order to maintain their security, diplomatic efforts must be maintained to ensure political stability in the world, to strengthen defensive efforts based on Japanese-American security system, considering it as the foundation, the backbone of their policy. However, Japan now focuses on strengthening the independence and autonomy, gradually raising its position in the relationship with the United States.

As an economic power, Japan is seeking to become a political power to play an appropriate role in the region and the world. Therefore, Japan emphasizes on its role and strengthens military power, expands the operation scope of Japanese defense forces. This is a remarkable adjustment of Japan in the strategy for the Asia-Pacific region. The date of July 01<sup>st</sup>, 2014 is an important milestone in the process of adjusting Japan's defense policy to become an "ordinary country"<sup>8</sup>.

#### ***Adjustment in the strategy of India***

Adjustment in the strategy of India for the Asia-Pacific region is most evident in the "turn East policy" which was officially announced in 1992 to strengthen relations with countries in Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia in particular and Asia-Pacific in general. This is one of India's important external policy adjustments during the post-Cold War era. In 2000, the Indian Ministry of Defense mentioned the East Sea as the easternmost point in the Indian Navy's strategic voyage in the Indian Ocean and said that the East Sea belongs to the "Concept of eastern expanded neighbor" of "turn East policy"<sup>9</sup>. In 2014, due to the joint statement after the summit between Indian Prime Minister N. Modi and the US President B. Obama, the "Eastern Action" policy was issued in replacement of "Turn East Policy".

The concern of regional and world powers makes the Asia-Pacific region becoming "hotter". Along with development opportunities, challenges are increasing for many countries in the region. Seizing and exploiting

<sup>5</sup> State Council Information Office of China. (2015, May 26). *White book of defense. "Chinese Military Strategy"*.

<sup>6</sup> Ministère de la Défense de la France (2013). *Livre blanc sur la défense et la sécurité nationale. Page 57-58.*

<sup>7</sup> Former Foreign Minister of France Laurent Fabius speaking at the headquarters of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) at Jakarta in Aug 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Content of Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution, under which the Japan's Defense Forces will participate in collective defense missions outside the national territory.

<sup>9</sup> Tran Thi Ly. (2002). *Adjustment of the foreign policy of the Republic of India from 1991 to 2000*. Hanoi: Publisher. Social science.

opportunities, overcoming challenges from Strategic adjustment of thriving countries depend on the view and strategy of each country in the region.

### **1.2. Impacts on Vietnam and policy recommendations**

The fact that powers have adjustments in the external strategy for Asia-Pacific has a lot of impact on the region. First of all, Concerning, focusing and strengthening the presence, including the military presence of powers in Asia-Pacific, will increase the competition of powers in the region and put countries in the region, especially small and medium countries, under great pressure, to adjust to appropriate policies. Located in the center of these push-and-pull forces, Vietnam also suffers from many complex reversible effects.

Regarding positive impacts, with the attention of powers to the region, Vietnam has conditions to develop cooperation relation with all powers, especially in the fields of economics, trade and investment. However, it is noteworthy that powers, though adjusting their policies, will hardly change policies towards Vietnam, most of them still follow their old orbit, even more actively. Vietnam with an independent and autonomous foreign policy, which has wide and deep relations with all powers, has been attracting powers to promote multifaceted relations with Vietnam.

In terms of negative impacts, the competition of influence among powers also forces Vietnam to have a skillful and flexible policy to maintain and strengthen good relations with all countries, both in the multilateral and bilateral aspects. The fact that the new administration of the United States pays attention to particular economic and commercial benefits also creates challenges for Vietnam. Vietnam has a trade surplus to the US with a rapid growth rate (USD 38.1 billion in 2016, increasing 15%). President Trump's administration has determined that Vietnam ranks the 6<sup>th</sup> in the list of 16 countries with trade surpluses with the US and needs to be investigated for commercial fraud and dumping. The decision of President Trump to withdraw the United States from the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP) also creates more complex challenges for Vietnam in the international economic integration. Besides, the increase in military presence in the East Sea of some powers also creates unpredictable challenges to security and protection of national sovereignty and territorial integrity of Vietnam. Regarding multilateral aspect, ASEAN's central role being challenged also has impact on Vietnam's support in protecting important interests such as the East Sea and the Mekong River.

In facing with interleaved opportunities and challenges, great fluctuations of the situation, Vietnam needs to determine the ultimate goal of ensuring national and ethnic benefits, based on the basic principles of international law, equality and mutual benefit. External activities must always aim to "serve the goal of maintaining a peaceful and stable environment, maximizing external resources to develop the country, improving people's lives; etc, improving position and prestige of the country and contributing to the peace, national independence, democracy and social progress in the world"<sup>10</sup>. According to that "immutable" foundation, although powers have adjustments in the policy, Vietnam still needs to strengthen good relations with other countries, gradually brings relations into depth, stability and more efficiency on the basis of seeking similar points and maximum protection of national benefits. Promoting cooperation with powers is often accompanied with gathering forces. Competition among powers in the region is increasing rapidly; Vietnam needs to be very alert to avoid having to choose one side or another. Well-handle and balanced relations between powers is the most important key to promote cooperation, seize the great opportunities provided by the policy adjustment of the countries.

When it comes to international economy, although the trend of trade protectionism has shown up, there is a negative impact on the trend of international economic integration. However, with the recognition of the irreversible integration and economic association trends of the world and the region, Vietnam must still proactively and actively participate in regional and international economic integration processes.

In parallel with Government's diplomatic efforts, Vietnam also needs to focus on informal diplomatic forms (Channel II diplomacy, non-governmental diplomacy), contribute to promoting political relations and at the same time, offer guidelines and solve problems arising in bilateral relations with powers.

## **II. CONCLUSION**

The situation of the world and the region in past years and especially in recent times has many complicated and unpredictable developments. Adjustment in the strategy of powers has created many consequences, including both opportunities and challenges for countries in the Asia-Pacific region, including Vietnam. Under that uncertain context, Vietnam has maintained its goal, persisted in the external policy affirmed at the Congress XII, and deployed foreign policy in a positive, proactive and flexible method. Diplomatic activities in recent years have been promoted in both bilateral and multilateral aspects.

In recognition of the irreversible trends of the world, along with its persistent in international integration, especially international economic integration, Vietnam not only maintains stability under challenges of the

<sup>10</sup> Communist Party of Vietnam. (2016). Documents of the XII Congress of the Party.

situation, but also rises to affirm its increasing position in the regional and international aspects. In consistent with flexible external policy on strategy based on national and ethnic benefits, Vietnam will not only continue to maintains stability under the complex fluctuations of the world and the region, but can also seize the opportunity to rise and affirm the country's position./.

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