



Research Paper

Solutions to Safeguard Vietnam's Sovereignty over Seas and Islands Today in Light of Ho Chi Minh Thought

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Abstract

Vietnam's maritime domains, encompassing its seas and islands, constitute a fundamental and inviolable component of the nation's territorial sovereignty. Beyond their profound symbolic importance, these maritime zones hold substantial economic value and function as vital conduits for bolstering international trade relations. Furthermore, they play an indispensable role in upholding national security and defense while holding significant strategic relevance in the overarching framework of national development and protection. Consequently, the safeguarding of Vietnam's maritime sovereignty has been deeply ingrained within the strategic calculus of the Communist Party, as underscored by its resolutions adopted at party congresses. This endeavor has become a foundational, enduring, and long-term responsibility, demanding active engagement from the entire Party, armed forces, citizenry, and political system alike. It stands as a critical strategic imperative in the context of contemporary nation-building and defense.

Keywords: solutions, safeguarding sovereignty, Vietnam's seas and islands, Ho Chi Minh Thought.

I. Introduction

Situated along the western margin of the East Sea, Vietnam occupies a geopolitically and geoeconomically advantageous position. The nation encompasses an area of approximately 332,698 square kilometers, bordered by 4,550 kilometers of land boundaries and a coastline extending 3,260 kilometers. Vietnam also claims sovereignty over an expansive maritime zone and continental shelf spanning nearly 1 million square kilometers. Within this maritime domain are over 3,000 islands of varying dimensions, most notably the Hoang Sa (Paracel) and Truong Sa (Spratly) archipelagos, comprising approximately 1,000 submerged reefs and shoals. This vast geographical expanse is home to a diverse population exceeding 93 million individuals belonging to 54 ethnic groups. Among Vietnam's 63 provinces and cities under central authority, 29 are identified as either coastal or island jurisdictions, including 11 island districts. Notably, roughly half of the nation's population resides in coastal regions, further underscoring the intertwined relationship between Vietnam's identity and its maritime territories. As a sovereign state, Vietnam's territorial integrity is an indivisible and inviolable whole. Safeguarding Vietnam's maritime sovereignty and territorial unity requires not only reinforcing national strength but also constructing a resilient national defense posture at sea. This task is indispensable for protecting the sacred maritime heritage of the nation and facilitating sustainable development over the long term. Achieving these objectives entails the collective dedication of all segments of society—encompassing the Party, armed forces, and civilians—thereby highlighting its paramount importance for ensuring Vietnam's enduring stability and progress.

II. Content

2.1 Ho Chi Minh Thought on Safeguarding Sovereignty over Seas and Islands in Our Country

Throughout his lifetime, President Ho Chi Minh consistently underscored that Vietnam's seas and islands are integral and indivisible components of the nation's sovereignty. Recognizing their strategic significance, he mobilized the entire Communist Party, the broader populace, and the armed forces to preserve and defend Vietnam's maritime territories with unwavering resolve. His profound insights on the matter remain a fundamental ideological foundation and a guiding principle in the modern safeguarding of this sacred sovereignty. Demonstrating far-reaching strategic vision, President Ho Chi Minh emphasized the vital role of Vietnam's seas and islands in both national defense and socio-economic development. He often highlighted their importance through vivid imagery, describing Vietnam as a nation blessed with "golden forests, silver seas, and fertile land." He perceived the "silver sea" not merely as a repository of material wealth but as a domain requiring prudent exploitation and vigorous protection. Vietnam's maritime regions host substantial economic resources and serve

as crucial conduits facilitating the nation's integration into regional and global economic frameworks. Fully understanding their importance, Ho Chi Minh assigned significant responsibility to coastal communities, designating them as "the guardians of the Fatherland's gate," tasked with defending Vietnam's extensive coastline, which forms both an economic lifeline and a critical defensive front. For President Ho Chi Minh, the safeguarding of territorial sovereignty over Vietnam's seas and islands was a prerequisite for sustainable national development. He often remarked on the nation's evolving status, transitioning from a time when it had only "night and forest" to an era enriched by "day, sky, and sea." This metaphorical shift underscored his emphasis on fully appreciating and protecting the nation's vast maritime inheritance. In his addresses to officers and soldiers of the Vietnam People's Navy, he made clear the immense strategic importance of Vietnam's coastline. He urged them to develop innovative strategies adapted to the country's geographical realities and limited military resources. Central to his approach was the blending of traditional combat methods honed during historic struggles against foreign invaders with contemporary military innovations to meet emerging challenges. A cornerstone of President Ho Chi Minh's doctrine on maritime sovereignty was the pivotal role of national unity in ensuring its defense. He believed that a strong collective spirit was essential for safeguarding maritime borders. On April 10, 1956, at a conference on mobilizing efforts in coastal areas, he emphasized self-reliance as an indispensable principle: "The people's forces, when well organized, form the primary force. We should not depend on others but must rely on our own strength." This strategic insight reflected his recognition that local communities were best positioned to respond with agility to immediate threats or acts of encroachment, especially before external or centralized reinforcements could be deployed. Within this framework of unified national effort, President Ho Chi Minh identified the Vietnam People's Navy as the linchpin of maritime defense capabilities. In a letter penned to naval officers and soldiers in 1965, he lauded their courage and steadfastness in protecting Vietnam's territorial integrity. Pointing out their early achievements despite limited experience and resources, he commended the fledgling navy for its resolute spirit under the Party's leadership. By protecting airspace, maritime boundaries, and the nation's people, they had upheld Vietnam's enduring traditions of heroism in the face of adversity. President Ho Chi Minh was also keenly aware that protecting maritime sovereignty posed ongoing and multidimensional challenges for Vietnam. He acknowledged that the nation's expansive maritime domain stood in sharp contrast to its relatively modest resources and anticipated that external powers might resort to diverse tactics, including military aggression, to assert dominance over these waters and islands. Consequently, he advocated for adaptive and context-sensitive strategies rooted in a thorough understanding of Vietnam's distinct geographical features, human capital, and military resource base. His vision continues to inspire contemporary efforts to ensure the comprehensive and sustainable protection of Vietnam's maritime territories amidst evolving geopolitical complexities.

According to him, "Our country is part of the world. The situation in our country affects the world, and the world situation also relates to our country" (6). Therefore, our country's struggle to protect the Fatherland is related to the common struggle of the progressive world; but we must "remain unchanged in principle while responding to ten thousand changes" to win the sympathy and support of progressive people around the world. Hence, we must pursue an open foreign policy, international integration, and good peaceful cooperation, while avoiding confrontation and not creating enmity with anyone. In relations with other countries and international organizations, we need to find common points and exploit all possible opportunities to gather forces and solidarity in support of Vietnam.

2.2. Some Solutions to Safeguard Vietnam's Sovereignty over Seas and Islands in the Current Period in Light of Ho Chi Minh Thought

2.2.1. Developing and implementing a focused, comprehensive, and well-prioritized strategy for marine economic development is a key step toward transforming the country into a leading maritime economy in the region. This strategy is deeply interconnected with national security, defense, and international collaboration.

Resolution No. 36-NQ/TW, issued on October 22, 2018, on the Strategy for Sustainable Development of Vietnam's Marine Economy until 2030, with a vision extending to 2045, emphasizes the goal for Vietnam to emerge as a strong maritime nation. The objectives include achieving prosperity, sustainable growth, and security while prioritizing the protection of independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. Sustainable marine economic development must closely integrate with ensuring national defense and security.

The strategy outlines several key measures. Rapid development of coastal economic zones and industrial parks is essential, with a focus on prioritizing energy industries, maritime industries, high-quality aquaculture, shipbuilding, seafood exploitation and processing. Urbanization efforts should aim at developing robust coastal economic centers, fostering a strategic advance toward the sea. Diverse service sectors such as exports, tourism, fisheries services, oil and gas exploration, and maritime transportation should be actively promoted. Island economies present another critical pillar, requiring scientific research, resource exploration, exploitation, and environmentally responsible aquaculture to be coupled with efforts to safeguard independence, sovereignty, and

territorial integrity. This also entails maintaining political security, ensuring social order, enhancing international cooperation, and cementing Vietnam's standing globally.

2.2.2. To achieve these goals effectively, socio-economic strategies, programs, and projects related to marine and island development should be carefully planned and implemented. Investments must be increased within coastal and marine sectors while modern mechanisms and policies are devised for disaster prevention and environmental protection in marine ecosystems.

Given the growing demands for managing, exploiting, and defending national maritime sovereignty under emerging conditions, it is crucial to establish a robust core force capable of achieving these objectives.

Successfully fulfilling this strategic mission requires leveraging the collective strength of an entire nation while focusing on building capable forces stationed at critical points. Both short-term and long-term initiatives should emphasize enhancing the capabilities of key entities like the Navy, Border Guard, Coast Guard, and maritime militia. These forces must be structured with adequate personnel and resources while maintaining high levels of skill across technical operations and joint combat coordination. Political integrity should act as their foundation.

Equipping the Navy and Coast Guard with modern weapons and technology aligned with regional developments and operational demands is integral to readiness. Furthermore, the synergy between primary forces and local military-civil units in coastal areas must be optimized to handle situations effectively. This will ensure comprehensive protection of Vietnam's maritime sovereignty while capitalizing on national unity as a driving force for economic development and territorial safeguarding in this new era.

2.2.3. It is necessary to be resolute and persistent in resolving maritime disputes, engage in dialogue to seek peaceful solutions, and participate in building a Code of Conduct in the East Sea through peaceful measures based on international law

As a member of the United Nations, Vietnam always adheres to the provisions of international law; it persistently follows the path of resolving arising issues through peaceful means, on the basis of equality and mutual respect; through negotiation and consultation to seek fundamental and long-term solutions that meet the legitimate interests of all concerned parties for the sake of independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of the Fatherland, and for peace, stability in the region and the world. In that spirit, bilateral disputes should be resolved bilaterally; disputes involving multiple parties should be resolved multilaterally and must be conducted with utmost transparency among the concerned parties. While striving to handle arising issues in the East Sea through peaceful means, we must be resolute and persistent in defending our legitimate interests at sea with the determination that "Vietnam will never allow even an inch of land or sea to be encroached upon"; persistently seek a long-term solution and demand that concerned parties exercise restraint, refrain from actions that complicate the situation, not use or threaten to use force, and comply with commitments to resolve issues through peaceful means based on the principles of international law.

2.2.4. In the current conditions, it is necessary to maximize propaganda work on sovereignty over seas and islands

To do this well, there must be close participation and coordination among ministries, sectors, localities, and mass media under the centralized and unified direction of the central functional agencies. At the same time, it is necessary to thoroughly grasp the Party and State's guidelines and policies on civilianization in sea and island areas, especially in strategically important sea and island areas, which have been strongly promoted and have had positive impacts on socio-economic development, creating favorable conditions to consolidate and build the people's heart posture at sea. In some islands with particularly important positions in national defense and security, the civilianization process has initially been implemented effectively, creating favorable public opinion among people both at home and abroad. Civilianization of sea and island areas is both the basis for us to effectively exploit marine resources and the premise for building, consolidating, and promoting on-site forces to serve the national defense and security strategy at sea.

2.2.5. It is necessary to effectively carry out defense-related external affairs advisory work

To perform this task well, it is necessary to advise the Party and State on formulating strategic guidelines and countermeasures to successfully handle defense, security, and external affairs situations. Strengthen and expand defense cooperation relations with other countries, especially countries in the region and major powers in the world, to increase mutual understanding and trust. The Navy and Coast Guard need to enhance exchanges with

partners, organize joint patrol activities, exercises, search and rescue operations at sea, contributing to maintaining a peaceful and stable environment and eliminating the risk of conflict at sea.

2.2.6. It is necessary to carry out the process of civilianization on seas and islands in conjunction with organizing population settlement, production organization, and marine exploitation

The process of civilianization on seas and islands must be executed alongside efforts to organize population settlements, production, and marine exploitation. This approach represents a highly significant strategic policy for preserving the nation's sovereignty over its seas and islands. By addressing the dual objectives of marine economic development and national security, this policy is actively being implemented to ensure Vietnam's sovereignty at sea remains robust and uncompromised.

In alignment with the guidelines and directives of the Party and State, civilianization efforts in maritime and island areas—particularly in strategically vital regions—have been vigorously promoted. These actions have positively influenced socio-economic development while laying the groundwork for strengthening the public's connection to the sea. This combined strategy seamlessly integrates socio-economic development with measures to enhance national security and defense. All planning related to coastal, maritime, and island-based socio-economic activities must adhere to systematic guidelines outlined in the defense area's overarching plan. Such planning should ensure a cohesive link between seas, islands, and the mainland. It must also synchronize the "static" defense posture of islands and shores with the "dynamic" stance of mobile combat forces at sea, thereby creating a unified and resilient national security framework.

III. Conclusion

Vietnam's seas and islands hold a sacred and irreplaceable place as part of the nation's territory, marking their importance in the broader scope of national construction, development, and security. Harnessing the strengths of a maritime nation through a long-term strategy that integrates marine economic growth with robust defense measures is essential for building a powerful maritime Vietnam. This strategy also aims to establish the marine economy as a cornerstone of national progress. Amidst growing complexities in regional and global affairs, the most pressing issue today is reinforcing national strength while building an inclusive defense posture at sea. Ultimately, safeguarding sovereignty over the nation's seas and islands remains a shared responsibility that involves the entire Party, people, and armed forces.

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