

The Structure of Vietnam-China Relations, 1991-2008

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Introduction

Much of the scholarly work that focuses on relations between Vietnam and China stresses the importance of bilateral relations (Amer 2004a and 2008, Vuving 2005 and 2006a and Womack 2006). This paper extends the framework of analysis to include the key multilateral and bilateral structures that influence this relationship. The paper is divided into three parts. The first deals with bilateral structures, the second considers multilateral structures and the third focuses on the interplay of multilateral and bilateral structures in fostering economic cooperation and managing territorial disputes.

Part one discusses the structure of bilateral relations since 1999-2000 when long-term cooperative framework agreements were reached between party and state officials. These agreements led to the creation of expert- and government-level working groups to consider key issues in dispute such as the land border, Gulf of Tonkin and the South China Sea (Amer 2008: 12). The long-term cooperative framework also resulted in the exchange of delegations led by high-level party and state officials.

Part two stresses the importance of multilateral structures and multilateral agreements negotiated by the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) with China prior to and after Vietnam's membership. Among the structures and agreements considered: ASEAN-China Joint Cooperation Committee and the Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity and Plan of Action (2005-2010). Part two also considers the influence of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) on Vietnam-China relations.

Part three reviews a number of issues relating to Sino-Vietnamese cooperation in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS), Gulf of Tonkin and South China Sea and evaluates the impact of multilateral and bilateral structures in dealing effectively with these issues. The paper concludes by noting the importance role of high-level leadership meetings, including the Joint Steering Committee on Cooperation, as key structures in the management of Vietnam-China relations.

Finally, the conclusion offers a net assessment of what the structure of Vietnam's bilateral and multilateral relations with China reveals about Vietnam's strategy for dealing with its northern neighbour. This section critically reviews five major strategies identified in the scholarly literature: balancing, hedging, bandwagoning, engagement and omni-enmeshment.

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Part 1. Bilateral Relations

After more than a decade-long estrangement (1978-89), leaders from Hanoi and Beijing met in southern China in September 1990 and agreed to normalize bilateral relations. China and Vietnam resumed high-level political contact in November 1991, pointedly only after Vietnam had agreed to a comprehensive political settlement in Cambodia. In early 1999, bilateral political relations were codified at a meeting of party leaders held in Beijing.¹

In the period between normalization of relations and the codification of political relations, Vietnam and China inaugurated discussions at the expert level to work out a settlement of their disputes regarding the land border and Gulf of Tonkin. The first expert-level discussions were held in October 1992. A year later, government-level talks led to agreement on the principles for the settlement of territorial disputes. The land border and Gulf of Tonkin disputes were separated and each assigned to a specialist joint working group. The joint working group on land issues first met in February 1994 and concluded in December 1999 after sixteen meetings when Vietnam and China signed a treaty on the land border. The joint working group on the Gulf of Tonkin first met in March 1994 and held seventeen meetings before reaching agreement. Expert-level discussions on maritime issues (eg. the South China Sea) commenced in November 1995.

In December 2000, Vietnam and China signed two important documents, the Agreement on the Demarcation of Waters, Exclusive Economic Zones and Continental Shelves in the Gulf of Tonkin and the Agreement on Fishing Cooperation in the Gulf of Tonkin. More importantly, Vietnam and China issued a Joint Statement for Comprehensive Cooperation in the New Century.² This document set out the structure of bilateral relations through a long-term framework for cooperation. Vietnam and China established a Joint Commission for Economic and Trade Cooperation to handle their economic relations. By January 2008, the Joint Commission had met six times.

It is notable that China also negotiated similar agreements with all the other regional states. Between February 1999 and December 2000, for example, China negotiated long-term cooperative framework arrangements with the other nine ASEAN members.³ Generally these took the form of joint statements signed by foreign ministers or vice premiers.

Defence Cooperation. Six of China's long-term cooperative framework agreements included a reference to security cooperation (Thailand, Malaysia, Brunei, Singapore, the Philippines, and Laos). Subsequently, several of these long-term framework agreements have been enhanced through additional joint declarations and/or memoranda of understanding. It is notable that no

¹Xinhua Domestic Service, February 27, 1999.

²Vietnam News Agency, December 25, 2000.

³These arrangements were variously titled: framework agreement, framework document, joint statement and joint declaration. For a detailed analysis consult: Thayer 2003a. For recent overviews of China's bilateral relations with Southeast Asia consult: Haacke 2005 and Percival 2007.

defence clause was included in the Sino-Vietnamese agreement, perhaps because of the contentious nature of unresolved territorial disputes in the South China Sea. According to the Vietnam-China joint statement, '[b]oth sides will refrain from taking any action that might complicate and escalate disputes, resorting to force or making threats with force'.

Table 1
Exchange Visits by Defence Ministers,
November 1991-September 2008

To China	To Vietnam
July 1991 Le Duc Anh	May 1993 Chi Haotian
December 1992 Doan Khue	February 2001 Chi Haotian
June 1998 Pham Van Tra	April 2006 Cao Gangchuan
July 2000 Pham Van Tra	
October 2005 Pham Van Tra	
August 2007 Phung Quang Thanh	

Defence contacts between Vietnam and China were first opened with the exchange of delegations by the external relations departments of their respective defence ministries in February and May 1992, respectively. Data for the period since normalization in November 2001 to September 2008 reveals an imbalance in the exchange of delegations at the ministerial level. Vietnam's defence minister visited China five times, while China's defence minister has made only three visits to Hanoi (see Table 1). The exchanges at the level of vice minister, Chief of the General Staff, and General Political Department are more balanced. Contact at the level of service chiefs has been confined to one visit by the PLA Navy Air Force in 1997.

China and ASEAN members carried out seventy-one bilateral high-level defence visits in the period from 2002 to 2006. Sixteen were ministerial level visits. Reciprocal visits by defence ministers were conducted by China with five countries including Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. Vietnam and China exchanged nine high-level delegations during this period. Between 2001 and 2006, China and Southeast Asia conducted eleven naval goodwill visits involving seven regional states. Chinese warships

visited Vietnam, Singapore (twice), Thailand and Brunei. The Chinese visit to Vietnam took place in November 2001 when a People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) *Jiangwei-II* guided missile frigate visited Ho Chi Minh City. The Vietnamese navy has yet to make a return visit.

Defence relations between China and Vietnam appear almost entirely focused on exchanges of views on 'army-building', regional security, ideological matters and border security issues. Since the normalization of relations both China and Vietnam have undertaken to de-mine and to dispose of unexploded ordnance in their frontier area. Since the signing of a treaty on their common border in 1999, both sides began to physically demarcate this area. In April 2005, China and Vietnam also commenced extremely low-key 'consultations on defensive security' in Beijing.⁴

In July 2005, President Tran Duc Luong made an official five-day state visit to China at the invitation of President Hu Jintao. The two leaders reaffirmed their commitment to step up joint development and negotiations for a Code of Conduct for the South China Sea (Montaperto 2005c). The joint statement significantly declared, 'between now and the end of 2005, the two sides will conduct joint investigation on fishery resources in joint fishing areas, so as to strive for launching joint patrols in Beibu Bay (Gulf of Tonkin) by the two navies and start the negotiation of the demarcation of the sea areas beyond the mouth of Beibu Bay (Gulf of Tonkin) as early as possible.'⁵

In October 2005, the Chinese and Vietnamese Defence Ministers, Cao Gangchuan and Pham Van Tra, respectively, reached agreement on the conduct of joint naval patrols in the Gulf of Tonkin. The purpose of the patrols was to strengthen cooperation between the two navies and maintain security of the fishing and oil exploration activities in this area. The defence ministers tentatively discussed cooperation between their national defense industries.⁶

During the first quarter of 2006, Hanoi received Jia Qinglin, a member of the Politburo Standing Committee, and Defence Minister, Cao Gangchuan (Sutter 2006). Cao came to complete arrangements for joint naval patrols and to promote China's military technology and professional training.⁷ Cao was also briefed on the tenth party congress. On 27th April, the Chinese and Vietnamese navies conducted their first joint patrol in the Gulf of Tonkin. This was a first for the PLAN. Vietnam's new Defence Minister, Phung Quang Thanh, made a return visit to Beijing in August to discuss cooperation between national defence industries and reciprocal training of high-level military officers.⁸

⁴China already conducts defence security consultations with Thailand and the Philippines.

⁵'China, Vietnam issue joint communiqué,' *People's Daily Online*, July 21, 2005..

⁶*Jane's Defense Weekly*, January 4, 2006, on line edition. China's state-owned armed supplier, NORINCO, was reported to have sold small arms ammunition artillery shells, and military vehicles to Vietnam. NORINCO was also reported to be assisting Vietnam in the co-production of ammunition and heavy machine guns.

⁷*Nhan Dan*, April 8, 2006.

⁸Xinhua August 9, 2006.

Party Secretary General Nong Duc Manh made an official visit to Beijing from 22-26 August, 2006. The state media noted that this was his first overseas trip since his re-election as party leader. Manh and his counterpart, Hu Jintao, agreed to boost trade, speed up border demarcation by the end of 2008, and step up discussions on the South China Sea (Sutter and Huang 2006b). The two leaders also reached agreement on joint projects in energy development, particularly in the Gulf of Tonkin.⁹ The joint communiqué noted that ‘both sides spoke positively of... the joint patrol conducted by the navies of the two countries in the Tonkin Gulf’.¹⁰

In October 2006, Vietnam’s Minister of Public Security visited Beijing to follow up on proposals for security cooperation. Later that month, Lt. General Le Van Dung, head of the Vietnam People’s Army General Political Department, journeyed to China to discuss professional military education and training exchanges.¹¹ General Dung’s visit to the National Defence University in Beijing suggested that Vietnam would send military officers there in the future.

In late October-early November, China commemorated the fifteenth anniversary of the establishment of dialogue relations with ASEAN by hosting a gala summit of heads of government in Nanning.¹² Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung attended and held a separate high-level meeting with Premier Wen Jiabao on 31st October. They agreed to complete negotiations on a framework treaty on economic and trade cooperation.¹³ Further, they reached accord to complete the delineation of the land border by 2008 and to step up negotiations on demarcation of maritime waters outside the Tonkin Gulf. They also discussed major joint construction projects involving upgrading rail and road links. The first meeting of the Steering Committee on Vietnam-China Bilateral Relations was convened on 11th November in Hanoi at deputy prime ministerial level.

President Hu Jintao made a separate state visit to Vietnam (15-17 November) in conjunction with his attendance at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit. During his visit China and Vietnam signed a framework agreement on economic and trade cooperation and a memorandum of understanding on the ‘two corridors, one circle’ cooperation.¹⁴ The two leaders also agreed to accelerate cooperation over a broad range of issues including joint exploration for oil and gas in the Gulf of Tonkin. Finally, both

⁹Xinhua, August 24, 2006. China had earlier provided funds for the construction of the 300 MW Cam Pha thermal Power Plant.

¹⁰‘China-Vietnam Joint Communiqué’, Beijing, August 24, 2006.

¹¹Vietnam News Service, October 25, 2006.

¹²VNA, October 31, 2006.

¹³Xinhua, November 1, 2006 and VNA, November 1, 2006.

¹⁴The two corridors consist of transport routes from Nanning to Lang Son-Hanoi-Hai Phong and Kunming-Lao Cai-Hanoi-Hai Phong. The circle (or belt) refers to the joint development of the Gulf of Tonkin. IN September 2008, the Asian Development Bank agreed to provide US \$1.1 billion to build a 244 kilometre highway linking Hanoi with Kunming. This is the most expensive project to be funded by the ADB.

leaders discussed their territorial disputes in the South China Sea (Sutter and Huang 2006c).

President Nguyen Minh Triet made a return visit to Beijing in May 2007. Triet and Hu reviewed bilateral economic and political relations (Suter and Huang 2007b). They reached agreement on the value of continued high-level visits and the efficacy of the Joint Steering Committee on Cooperation. A joint statement issued after their discussions affirmed the leaders' commitment to complete the demarcation of the land border by 2008 and to step up joint oil and gas exploration in the Gulf of Tonkin. Both sides agreed to refrain from taking unilateral actions that would upset the status quo or exacerbate conflict in the South China Sea.

In August 2007, the Chinese and Vietnamese defence ministers, Cao Gangchuan and Phung Quang Thanh, signed an Agreement on Border Defence Cooperation between their respective ministries.¹⁵ On 8th November, the border defence agreement came into force. It set out the 'basic principles on the coordinating relationship, information regulations and the responsibility of the two countries' border protection and management forces.'¹⁶

Since normalization of relations in 1991, Vietnam and China have created a dense network of mechanisms to manage their bilateral relations. Based on the 1999 party-to-party agreement and the 2000 joint declaration on comprehensive cooperation in the new century, Vietnam and China have signed fifty-four state-level agreements and fifty-nine bilateral cooperation documents. By 2008, Vietnam and China now exchange more than one hundred delegations at all levels annually including the regular exchange visits by party leaders, prime ministers/premiers and other key ministers (foreign affairs, defence, public security etc.).

In 1993 Vietnam and China reached agreement on the basic principles to manage their common border and maritime territory. This led to agreement on demarcating the land border in 1999 and the Gulf of Tonkin in 2000. By 2008 China and Vietnam put in place approximately eighty-five percent of the approved border markers. A border management treaty is currently under negotiation. The agreement on the Gulf of Tonkin was accompanied by an agreement on fishing cooperation. Subsequently, in 2004, both sides negotiated a protocol on a joint fishing area and agreed to joint naval patrols.

Part 1 has stressed the importance of this network of joint agreements in structuring the bilateral relationship. Key documents provide for the regular exchange of high-level visits by party and state leaders that have proven to be effective in addressing pressing issues. Part 2 will extend this analysis to a consideration of multilateral structures that influence the management of relations between Vietnam and China.

¹⁵The two ministers also agreed to continue to address differences over the South China Sea.

¹⁶'Vietnam, China enhance border defence cooperation,'Vietnam.net, November 9, 2007.

Part 2. Multilateral Structures

This section discusses the structure of Vietnam's relations with China through Vietnam's membership in three multilateral institutions: ASEAN, the ASEAN Regional Forum and the Greater Mekong Subregion.

Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Formal linkages between China and ASEAN date to 1991 when Foreign Minister Qian Qichen attended the 24th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Kuala Lumpur as a guest of the Malaysian government. Qian expressed China's interest in developing cooperation in the field of science and technology. ASEAN responded positively and in September 1993 dispatched ASEAN Secretary General Dato Ajit Singh to Beijing to follow up on Qian's proposal. Singh held discussions with Vice Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan. In July 1994, ASEAN and China reached formal agreement to establish two joint committees — one on science and technology cooperation and the other on economic and trade cooperation. ASEAN and China also agreed to open consultations on political and security issues at the senior official level. The first ASEAN-China Senior Officials Meeting was held in Hangzhou in April 1995. Vietnam joined ASEAN in July 1995 and assumed the obligation to honour all past ASEAN agreements with China.

In 1996, China was accorded official dialogue partner status by ASEAN. As an ASEAN dialogue partner, China commenced regular participation in the annual ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference consultation process. This took the form of a meeting between ASEAN and its ten dialogue partners (ASEAN Ten Plus Ten), and a separate meeting between ASEAN members and each of its dialogue partners (ASEAN Ten Plus One). In February 1997, ASEAN and China formalized their cooperation by establishing the ASEAN-China Joint Cooperation Committee (ACJCC). The ACJCC first met in Beijing where it was agreed that it would 'act as the coordinator for all the ASEAN-China mechanisms at the working level'¹⁷

In December 1997 at the 2nd Informal ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur, ASEAN initiated a new process with the heads of state/government from China, Japan and South Korea that has since become known as the ASEAN Plus Three process. ASEAN also met separately with each head of state/government. After the ASEAN-China meeting the leaders issued a joint statement that 'reaffirmed their common interest in developing the Mekong Basin and pledged to strengthened their support for the riparian countries by promoting activities in the areas of trade, tourism and transport.'¹⁸

Three years later at the 4th ASEAN Informal Summit held in Singapore in November 2000, China's Premier Zhu Rongji announced a major commitment to the development of the Mekong. At the next ASEAN summit in Brunei in November 2001, ASEAN endorsed the creation of a free trade area with

¹⁷Joint Press Release, 'The First ASEAN-China Joint Cooperation Committee Meeting', Beijing, February 26-28, 1997.

¹⁸Joint Statement of the Meeting of Heads of State/Government of the Member States of ASEAN and the President of the People's Republic of China, December 16, 1997.

China. China, for its part, proposed five areas of cooperation including development of the Mekong River basin.

China-ASEAN relations progressed to a new stage in November 2002 with the signing of three major documents: Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Between ASEAN Nations and the People's Republic of China, Joint Declaration between China and ASEAN on Cooperation in Non-Traditional Security Fields, and Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC).

The first agreement laid the foundations for the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area. The joint declaration on non-traditional security was formalized in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in January 2004.¹⁹ A major advance towards the free trade area was taken in January 2007 when China and ASEAN signed the Agreement on Trade in Services at their tenth summit in Cebu, the Philippines. Originally, ASEAN sought to negotiate a Code of Conduct for the South China Sea. China resisted ASEAN diplomatic pressure to agree to a formal legally-binding code. Nevertheless, China and ASEAN were able to develop unprecedented cooperation under the umbrella of the DOC (see below for further discussion).

Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity. In October 2003, China's zone of interaction with ASEAN was substantially enhanced when China acceded to the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (Thayer forthcoming). The two parties then issued a joint declaration establishing an ASEAN-China strategic partnership. The joint declaration was the first formal agreement of this type between China and a regional organization, as well as a first for ASEAN itself. The joint declaration was wide-ranging and included a provision for the initiation of a new security dialogue as well as general cooperation in political matters.²⁰

In July the following year, State Councilor Tang Jiaxuan raised the prospect of developing 'enhanced strategic relations' with ASEAN in his discussions with Secretary General Ong Keng Yong in Beijing. As a result, in late 2004, China and ASEAN drafted a five-year Plan of Action (2005-2010). This plan included, *inter alia*, a joint commitment to increase regular high-level bilateral visits, cooperation in the field of non-traditional security, security dialogue and military exchanges and cooperation.²¹ The Plan of Action set out the following objectives:

¹⁹The MOU followed a special meeting held in Bangkok in April 2003 to discuss joint action to deal with the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) epidemic. In September 2004, China hosted the ARF Workshop on Drug-Substitute Alternative Development and in March 2005, China hosted an ARF seminar on enhancing cooperation in the field of non-traditional security issues.

²⁰Joint Declaration of the Heads of State/Government of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the People's Republic of China on Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity, October 8, 2003. For an analysis consult: Breckon 2003a.

²¹Plan of Action to Implement the Joint Declaration of ASEAN-China Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity.

- Promote mutual confidence and trust in defense and military fields with a view to maintaining peace and stability in the region;
- Conduct dialogues, consultations and seminars on security and defense issues;
- Strengthen cooperation on military personnel training;
- Consider observing each other's military exercises and explore the possibility of conducting bilateral or multilateral joint military exercises; and
- Explore and enhance cooperation in the field of peacekeeping.

ASEAN has been reluctant to advance military cooperation with China too quickly. In May 2004, during the course of a visit to Beijing by Malaysia's new prime minister, Abdullah Badawi, his Chinese counterpart, Premier Wen Jiabao, suggested they consider a joint undertaking to maintain the security of sea lines of communication through the Malacca Strait. This proposal was pressed the following month by Senior Colonel Wang Zhongchun, deputy director of China's National Defense University. In a paper presented to the China-ASEAN forum in Singapore, Wang proposed joint naval exercises and patrols and intelligence exchanges on terrorism. According to one analyst, Wang's proposal was received coolly and with considerable skepticism by the audience (Montaperto 2004a).²²

In September 2003, Wu Bangguo, chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, reiterated a proposal for joint oil exploration and development in areas of overlapping claims in the South China Sea. Early the following year, ASEAN and China agreed to set up a Joint Working Group to implement the DOC. In November 2004, at the 8th China-ASEAN Summit, Premier Wen Jiabao restated China's long-standing proposal to shelve disputes in the South China Sea 'while going for joint development.' This led to a major breakthrough on March 14, 2005 when the national oil companies of China, the Philippines and Vietnam signed an agreement to conduct joint seismic testing in the South China Sea.²³

In April 2005, ASEAN and China held their eleventh Senior Officials Meeting. Vice Foreign Minister Wu Dawei stressed that the ASEAN-China strategic partnership was vital for regional security and that China supported ASEAN's

²²In 2007, however, Indonesia proposed seeking technical assistance from both China and Japan on an ASEAN-wide and bilateral basis to build up the capacity of the littoral states; see Shefall Rekhi, 'Indonesia seeks wider China and Japan role', *The Straits Times*, June 4, 2007.

²³"Tripartite agreement on joint survey of seismic activity in East Sea signed', Vietnam News Agency, March 14, 2005 and Ma. Theresa Torres and Niel Villegas Mugas, 'RP, China, Vietnam to explore Spratlys', *The Manila Times*, March 16, 2005. Premier Wen Jiabao and Prime Minister Phan Van Khai held sideline discussions at the 2nd GMS Summit in July 2005 and agreed to work more closely with the Philippines to implement the joint agreement; 'China, Vietnam agree to joint exploration of disputed areas', Xinhua, Beijing, July 4, 2005; and 'China, Philippines, Vietnam work on disputed South China Sea area', Xinhua, August 27, 2005. This agreement lapsed in 2008.

leading role in regional multilateral cooperation (Montaperto 2005b). More significantly, China agreed to participate on the Working Group on Implementing the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea.

In July 2005, President Hu Jintao reiterated China's decade old call for joint development during the course of state visits to Brunei, Indonesia and the Philippines.²⁴ At the same time, China and ASEAN officially set up the Joint Working Group on the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea and charged it with recommending measures to implement the agreement. The Working Group held its second meeting in Hainan in February 2006. In light of deadly pirate attacks on Chinese fishing vessels in May, China, the Philippines and Vietnam agreed to strengthen security cooperation in the South China Sea.²⁵

The ASEAN-China strategic partnership was taken a step forward with the holding of the first workshop on regional security between defence officials in Beijing in July 2006. This workshop discussed maritime cooperation, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, counter terrorism and peacekeeping operations (Sutter and Huang 2006b).

In October 2006, ASEAN and China also held a heads of government Commemorative Summit in Nanning to mark the fifteenth anniversary of China's status as a dialogue partner. Premier Wen Jiabao called for the expansion of military dialogue and exchanges and defence cooperation in such fields as maritime security, counter terrorism, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, transnational crime and the spread of infectious disease (Sutter and Huang 2006c).

In the joint statement all parties reaffirmed their commitment to the creation of an China-ASEAN Free Trade Area by 2010. Trade in goods was to be liberalized between China and the six oldest ASEAN members by that date, while the newest members (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam) were given until 2015. Ten priority areas were identified including the development of the Mekong Basin (Sutter and Huang 2006c). Finally, the leaders pledged to implement the 2002 DOC and to promote joint economic development in the South China Sea.

By the end of 2006, ASEAN and China had concluded twenty-eight 'cooperation framework mechanisms,' including regular consultations between senior officials on strategic and political security cooperation, a yearly conference of foreign ministers, and an annual summit meeting of government leaders (Sutter and Hoang 2006b). These developments provided a foundation for the potential development of security and defense cooperation in the future.

²⁴Xinhuanet, Beijing, July 19, 2005 in *People's Liberation Army Daily*, July 20, 2005.

²⁵Agence France-Presse, 'Philippines, China, Vietnam to cooperate in Spratlys security', Channelnewsasia.com, May 19, 2006.

The 11th China-ASEAN and ASEAN Plus China summits were held in Singapore in November 2007. Premier Wen Jiabao's keynote speeches reiterated staple themes of Chinese foreign policy (Sutter and Huang 2007d). Wen urged his Southeast Asian counterparts to step up cooperation and joint development in the South China Sea under the umbrella of the 2002 DOC. He also repeated China's call for closer military cooperation in dealing with non-traditional threats to security. Wen also suggested exchanges among national defence academies. And, in a relatively new development, Premier Wen called for the setting up of a joint expert group to study proposals for pan-Beibu (Tonkin) Gulf economic cooperation.²⁶

In March 2008, China-ASEAN military cooperation took a step forward when China hosted a high-level meeting of ASEAN senior defence officials and scholars (Sutter and Huang 2008a). The focus of the meeting was on building China-ASEAN regional and military confidence. Regional anxieties about China's increased defence spending and force modernization was voiced by an Indonesian official who called on China to be more transparent and not to use its increased capabilities to threaten regional states.

When Vietnam joined ASEAN in July 1995 it agreed to adhere to all multilateral arrangements entered into between ASEAN and China. After joining ASEAN, Vietnam participated in ASEAN's consensual decision-making process in shaping future relations with China. The structure of ASEAN-China relations thus forms an important part of Vietnam's framework for the conduct of bilateral relations with its northern neighbour.

ASEAN Regional Forum. Vietnam was a founding member of the ASEAN Regional Forum in 1994. The ARF provides a multilateral framework for Vietnam's defence-security relations and interaction with China and other major powers.

When China first joined the ASEAN Regional Forum it was highly suspicious about multilateral activities that might curtail its national sovereignty. Over time, however, China has come to embrace multilateral security cooperation under the auspices of the ARF (Ba 2006). China has taken a particularly active role in the ARF's inter-sessional work program related to confidence building measures. In March 1997, for example, China hosted the Inter-Sessional Group on Confidence Building Measures, and did so again in November 2003.

In 1997, China sent representatives to the ARF meeting of Heads of Defense Colleges and hosted the 4th ARF meeting of the Heads of Defense Colleges in September 2000. This meeting was opened by Defence Minister Chi Haotian, who argued that the ARF's stress on dialog and consultation represented a 'new security concept' and the trend of 'multi-polarization' in the region. Chi noted that regional flash points still existed, 'hegemonism and power politics

²⁶The third annual Pan-Beibu Gulf economic cooperation forum was held in Beihai, Guangxi in July 2008. It was attended by delegates from Brunei, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. The first two forums were held in Nanning, Guangxi in 2006 and 2007.

have shown new traces of development' and 'democracy and human rights' were being used as excuses for intervention, and

separatism was gaining ground. All these will endanger or jeopardize the security and stability of the region. That's why we advocate that all countries adopt the new security concept built upon equality, dialogue, mutual confidence and cooperation.²⁷

In 2000, China also contributed for the first time to the ARF's *Annual Security Outlook* and began providing voluntary briefings on regional security.

While China's participation in the ARF's program of confidence building measures has evolved over time, China's endorsement of preventive diplomacy has been more circumscribed. In a Defence White Paper issued in late 2000, China provided this cautious assessment:

China holds that the ARF should continue to focus on confidence-building measures, explore new security concepts and methods, and discuss the question of preventive diplomacy. At the same time, it believes that the parties concerned should have a full discussion first on the concept, definition, principles and scope of preventive diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific region and reach consensus in this regard (People's Republic of China 2001).

According to one China analyst 'two of the defining features of that document [the 2000 Defence White Paper] were the emphasis on the dominance of peace and development as forces driving global development and a corollary imperative toward implementing external policies based upon multilateral cooperative approaches' (Montaperto 2004b). Since 2000, China has consistently promoted its new security concept as the preferred framework for multilateral cooperation. In July 2002, for example, China outlined its new security concept in a position paper presented to the annual ARF ministerial meeting.

In 2003, China launched a major initiative to further its new concept of security. At the annual ARF ministerial meeting in Phnom Penh, China proposed the creation of a Security Policy Conference comprised of senior military and civilian officials at vice minister level drawn from all ARF members. The objective of this new security mechanism was to draft a security treaty to promote 'peace, stability and prosperity' in the region. Chinese officials said the new treaty would give equal attention to the concerns of all ARF members and guarantee security through united action rather than seeking 'absolute security for oneself and threaten[ing] other parties' security' (Breckon 2003b).

China drafted and circulated a concept paper prior to hosting the first ARF Security Policy Conference in November 2004 (Dillon and Tkacik 2005). Premier Wen Jiabao opened the conference to underscore China's commitment to multilateral security cooperation. Delegates to this inaugural conference agreed to start modestly by considering new channels of

²⁷Xinhua News Agency, September 6, 2000.

communication to deal with counter terrorism and non-traditional threats (Montaperto 2004b).

At the 11th ARF Ministerial Meeting in 2004, China tabled a series of proposals for the future development of the ARF. These were later summarized as follows:

To maintain its forum nature and adhere to the basic principles of decision-making through consensus, taking an incremental approach, and moving at a pace comfortable to all members so as to encourage the initiative and active participation of all members; to continuously strengthen and consolidate confidence-building measures (CBMs) while actively addressing the issue of preventive diplomacy, so as to gradually find out cooperative methods and approaches for preventive diplomacy that are suitable to the region and fitting the current needs; to increase participation of defense officials, promote exchanges and cooperation among militaries of the countries concerned and give full play to the important role of the militaries in enhancing mutual trust; to highlight cooperation in non-traditional security fields such as counter-terrorism and combating transnational crimes (People's Republic of China 2004).

In December 2004 China issued another Defense White Paper. It identified five main areas of international security cooperation: strategic consultation and dialogue; regional security cooperation; cooperation in non-traditional security fields, participating in United Nations peacekeeping operations; and military exchanges. Chapter nine highlighted the importance China placed on its interaction with ASEAN and the ASEAN Regional Forum.

The Defense White Paper also set out Beijing's policy on international cooperation in the area of defense-related science, technology and industry including the export of military products and related technologies. According to this document, China's exports in this sensitive area were governed by three principles: 'It should only serve the purpose of helping the recipient state enhance its capability for legitimate self-defense; it must not impair peace, security and stability of the relevant region and the world as a whole; and it must not be used to interfere in the recipient state's internal affairs' (People's Republic of China 2004, chapter seven).

The 13th ARF annual meeting was held in Kuala Lumpur in July 2006. China played an important role on the major issues of the day (North Korean missile tests and Myanmar). China demonstrated once again that the ARF remained its preferred multilateral forum for the discussion of regional political and security issues (Sutter and Huang 2006b). At the 14th ARF annual meeting in Manila in August 2007, Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi once again stressed China's 'new security concept.' Yang also revived an old theme to warn against the actions of states (read the United States and Japan) that sought to 'reinforce bilateral military alliances' and seek 'absolute military superiority' (Sutter and Huang 2007c).

Greater Mekong Subregion. The Mekong River passes through six countries: China, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam. All riparian countries view the Mekong as a major resource for food, transport and energy

to be utilized for national economic development. China's rise and rapid economic growth is widely viewed as both an opportunity and a challenge for downstream states, all of whom are members of ASEAN. ASEAN and China have committed themselves to creating a free trade area. It would seem to be in the national interests of all six countries to minimize conflict over the Mekong's shared resources by cooperating in water management and engaging in joint development. Cooperation over the Mekong should contribute to development, economic integration and regional security.

There are two major multilateral institutions that are concerned with the development of the Mekong River and its surrounding area. The Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) was created in October 1992 on the initiative of the Asian Development Bank, while the Mekong River Commission (MRC) was formed in 1995.²⁸ China is not a member of either the GMS or MRC. The lack of official participation by the central Chinese government severely hampers the effectiveness of both these institutions. China claims sovereignty over the Upper Mekong (Lancang Jiang) and views the construction of a cascade of dams its own internal affair despite the potentially devastating impact downstream.

The GMS includes Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam and the Chinese province of Yunnan and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. The GMS work programme has passed through four phases: confidence-building (1992-94), identification of priority sectors (1994-96), project development (1996-2000) and project implementation (2000-present).

GMS decision-making was initially based on an annual ministerial-level meeting until 2002 when it was superseded by regular summit meetings. China hosted the 2nd GMS Summit in Kunming, Yunnan in July 2005. Premier Wen Jiabao in his keynote address to the summit reaffirmed China's financial commitment to GMS programmes and tabled a seven-point plan to step up economic cooperation and infrastructure development (Montaperto 2005c). Wen also announced that preferential tariffs would be granted to goods from Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar.

It is significant to note that cooperation under GMS auspices is not undertaken on the basis of a formal treaty or other legally-binding obligation. Rather, GMS cooperation has become imbued with the norms of 'the ASEAN Way', that is, decision-making is informal and voluntary. Individual GMS members are permitted to undertake cooperative programmes without first obtaining the consent of all parties.

The GMS may be viewed as the sum of its mini-lateral cooperative programs. Agreed programmes are implemented by subregional coordinating committees, working groups and fora in nine sectoral areas: transportation

²⁸The current MRC had its origins in the Mekong Committee formed in 1957. In 1975 Cambodia (Khmer Rouge regime) withdrew and an Interim Mekong Committee (IMC) was created in 1978. After the settlement of the Cambodian conflict in 1991, Cambodia rejoined and the IMC became the Mekong River Commission. Current membership includes Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam but not China and Myanmar. In 1995 a dialogue mechanism was created for MRC discussions with China and Myanmar.

infrastructure, telecommunications, energy development, environmental management, human resources development, trade facilitation, investment, tourism and agriculture.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to consider all forms of cooperation under the umbrella of the GMS. The GMS takes in a much wider geographical area than the Mekong River basin and thus provides a unique framework for cooperation between Vietnam and China to develop their respective border regions. Since the early 1990s, both China and Vietnam have included the development of border regions in their national development plans.

Cross-border cooperation involves the interplay of national and local authorities and has led to burgeoning trade as well as substantial development of energy, communications and transport infrastructure. Since 2004, for example, China has emerged as Vietnam's largest trading partner with trade weighted heavily in China's favour. Vietnam is Guangxi province's most important trading partner. Vietnam buys electricity from Yunnan province's power grid. The border crossing at Lao Cai-Hekou has developed into a substantial market, and land locked Kunming has access to the sea via a rail line that passes through Lao Cai to the port of Hai Phong. As noted above, in October 2004 Premier Wen Jiabao described the infrastructure linking China and Vietnam as 'two corridors, one circle'.

In November 2004, China announced that it would increase funding to upgrade the rail line between Kunming and Hanoi. A year later, a new highway connecting Nanning and National Route 1 in Vietnam was opened. In 2007, China and Vietnam agreed to construct an economic cooperation zone astride the border at Pingxiang city, Guangxi and Lang Son province in Vietnam (Sutter and Huang 2007b). In March 2008, Vietnam and China signed a MOU to include the Nanning-Hanoi corridor and the Youyiguan-Huu Nghi Border Crossing Point under the umbrella of the GMS Cross-Border Transport Agreement. In May 2008, Vietnam hosted the first conference of the Joint Working Committee including officials from Cao Bang, Lang Son and Quang Ninh provinces and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Two months later, Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung approved the construction of a six-lane expressway from Hanoi to Lang Son to connect with Guangxi. The net result of cross-border cooperation has been to facilitate the movement of Chinese goods beyond Vietnam to Southeast Asia.

Part 3. Issues in Sino-Vietnamese Cooperation

In October 2007, Hu Jintao, General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, speaking to the 17th party congress, introduced the concept of 'harmonious world' to replace 'China's peaceful rise' and 'China's peaceful development' as the major foreign policy theme of his tenure (for background see Zhang 2007). There were three major implications for Southeast Asia (Sutter and Huang 2007d). First, China sought to bolster its influence in the region by forging strategic partnerships with Southeast Asian states through economic integration and cooperation in non-traditional issues. Second, China sought to develop its southern region (Yunnan and Guangxi) by promoting the development of the Greater Mekong Subregion and pan-Beibu (Tonkin) Gulf.

Third, China continued to support ASEAN and other regional organisations as long as they were beneficial to itself.²⁹

Greater Mekong Subregion. Multilateral cooperation to develop the Mekong River Basin and the Greater Mekong Subregion is hostage to China's absence from these two bodies, the participation of Yunnan province and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region in the GMS notwithstanding. China commands the dominant position because it is the upstream state and by virtue of its economic power and growing military might. China has made it repeatedly clear that it rejects the principles of water management adopted by the MRC. The construction of a cascade of dams on the Upper Mekong (Langcang Jiang) reportedly is already impacting negatively on downstream states. If China continues with its plans to construct further dams, this will have potentially wide ranging impacts on water flow and the ecosystem including Vietnam's rice basket, the Mekong Delta.

The MRC and GMS, although they share similar goals and objectives, pursue them by different means and structures. A recent study by Mark Buntaine (2007) concluded that China has deliberately fostered the development of overlapping non-hierarchical institutions in order to separate economic development from environmental issues. Buntaine terms this process 'issue fragmentation', that is, 'China has used its position as a regional leader to focus policy coordination in institutions favourable to its interests, while fragmenting overlapping institutions through selective participation' (2007). In other words, despite the growing economic interdependence of states comprising the Greater Mekong Subregion, Chinese actions have retarded the development of cooperative governance structures. Vietnam is thus unable to raise its concerns about seasonal waters flows into the Mekong Delta in either the MRC (of which China is not a member) or the GMS (because the focus is on cross-border trade and infrastructure development).

Gulf of Tonkin. In contrast to the Greater Mekong Subregion, Vietnam and China have been able to cooperate successfully in the Gulf of Tonkin. The foundation for Sino-Vietnamese cooperation rests on the 2000 agreement that delineated the maritime boundary by setting out precise map coordinates along a modified line of equidistance (Amer 2004: 332).³⁰ The agreement came into force in June 2004 with the signing of the supplementary protocol on the joint fishing area. In October 2004, Premier Wen Jiabao came to Hanoi to firm up fishing cooperation as well as to speed up the process of demarcation of the land border .

In January 2005, a reported shooting incident in the Tonkin Gulf that led to death of eight Vietnamese fishermen, highlighted the need to manage the common fishing zone (Thao and Amer 2007: 313). Despite this incident, in November 2005, the Vietnam Petroleum Corporation (PetroVietnam) and the China National Offshore Oil Corporation reached agreement to conduct joint exploration for oil and gas in the Gulf of Tonkin. On January 2007, Prime

²⁹Zhai Kun, 'Harmony through East Asia Friendship,' *China Daily*, November 19, 2007.

³⁰The line of equidistance had to be modified in order to take into account the effect of islands, such as Vietnam's Bach Long Vi.

Minister Nguyen Tan Dung approved this agreement. As noted above, Vietnam and China conducted their first joint naval patrols in April 2006. Four additional patrols have been carried out since then: December 2006, July 2007, October 2007, and May 2008.

Secretary General Nong Duc Manh visited Beijing in late May-early June 2008 at the invitation of Hun Jintao, General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (Sutter and Huang 2008b). Their joint statement declared, 'the two sides will continue to implement the [Gulf of Tonkin] Demarcation Agreement and the Agreement on Fishery Cooperation in the [Gulf of Tonkin] and carry out joint inspection in the fishing zone, joint survey of fishery resources, and joint naval patrols. The two sides will accelerate the implementation of the Framework Agreement on Oil and Natural Gas Cooperation in Agreed Zones in the [Gulf of Tonkin]...'31

Also, China and Vietnam have entered into discussions to delineate waters beyond the mouth of the Gulf of Tonkin. The fourth meeting on this issue was held in Beijing in January 2008.

South China Sea. The dispute between Vietnam and China over waters and features in the South China Sea has proved intractable. Despite progress over issues relating to the Gulf of Tonkin, overlapping claims to the South China Sea remain a constant irritant. In October 2004, after Premier Wen Jiabao's successful visit to Hanoi, China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs voiced 'serious concern' about Vietnam's release of bids to explore for oil and gas in waters over its continental shelf (Montaperto 2004b). China claimed that Vietnamese actions went against earlier commitments. Vietnam nonetheless proceeded with the bidding process.

Minor incidents continued to crop up. In March 2005, China claimed that its fishermen in the South China Sea had been attacked by Vietnamese 'sea robbers' (Montaperto 2005a). China called on Vietnam to join with it to suppress maritime crimes. Two months later a Vietnamese cargo ship sank off the coast of Shanghai fueling speculation that it had been fired upon by Chinese naval forces which conducted naval maneuvers at that time. On May 12th, the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement declaring that China was not responsible for the ship's loss (Montaperto 2005b).

Expert-level talks on maritime issues (South China Sea), which were inaugurated in November 1995, are still ongoing. Both sides have yet to agree on an agenda. Vietnam insists that both the Paracel and Spratly archipelagoes be included in the discussions. China insists that the Paracels be excluded and that the discussions focus on the Spratlys including disputed waters and continental shelf.

In April 2006, the 10th National VCP Congress adopted a resolution decreeing that Vietnam's maritime areas should be developed with a focus on sectors that have comparative advantages 'in order to develop a strong maritime economy, maintain national defence and security in a spirit of international

³¹'Joint Statement Between China and Vietnam,' People's Republic of China, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, June 1, 2008.

cooperation'. This matter was considered by the fourth plenum of VCP the Central Committee that met in January 2007. Reports submitted to this meeting noted that there was no coherent plan to integrate the economic development of coastal areas with the exploitation of marine resources in Vietnam's territorial waters. Economists estimated that by 2020, the marine economy could contribute up to 55 percent of GDP and between 55-60 percent of exports if it were developed in a comprehensive manner.

The fourth plenum directed that a national Maritime Strategy Towards the Year 2020 be drawn up to integrate economic development with environmental protection and national defence and security. The Vietnam People's Army was tasked with 'defending territorial waters and safeguarding national sovereignty.' The maritime strategy was completed by the end of the year but has not yet been released publicly.

Vietnam's adoption of a new maritime strategy coincided with increased Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea. China claims the waters and features that Vietnam seeks to develop. China has reportedly applied pressure on foreign firms that were likely to be involved in developing Vietnam's maritime sector, warning them that their commercial operations in China might suffer if they became involved in developing areas claimed by China. In July 2008, for example, an ExxonMobile executive revealed that his company had come under Chinese pressure to scrap a preliminary exploration agreement with PetroVietnam.³²

In March 2007, it was announced that British Petroleum (BP) and its partners had submitted plans to the Vietnamese Ministry of Industry to invest US \$2 billion in a major expansion in gas and power over the next decade. These plans included installing at least two natural gas pipelines connecting off shore deposits in two new gas fields, Moc Tinh and Hai Thach, in the Nam Con Son basin in the South China Sea. BP's plans also included the construction of a power plant in Nhon Trach in Dong Nai province.³³ BP currently maintains the only operational pipeline which connects the Lan Tay-Lan Do gas field in the Nam Con Son basin to the Phu My power complex in Ba Ria-Vung Tau. The new fields to be connected to the proposed pipeline are adjacent to the fields from which BP presently operates.

The question of BP's future operations quickly became a contentious issue in Sino-Vietnamese relations. On April 10th, Qin Gang, a spokesperson for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was directly asked by a reporter from the state-run media about BP's proposed pipeline and Vietnam's plan to hold voting for the National Assembly on its possessions in the South China Sea. Qin replied, 'China has indisputable sovereignty over the Nansha Islands and their adjacent waters and neighbouring marine areas... Vietnam's new actions, which infringe on China's sovereignty, sovereign rights and administrative rights on the Nansha Islands, go against the important

³²Greg Torode, 'Tussle for oil in the South China Sea', *South China Morning Post*, July 20, 2008.

³³Dong Ha, 'BP, PetroVietnam rearrange gas pipeline overhauls plan', *Thanh Nien*, March 14, 2007

consensus reached by leaders of the two countries on the maritime issue and are not beneficial to stability of the South China Sea area.³⁴ Qin noted that any one-sided action taken by any country in the South China Sea is 'illegal and invalid' constituting an encroachment upon Chinese territorial sovereignty.³⁵ Qin was also quoted as stating: 'It is not beneficial to stability in the South China Sea area. The Chinese side is paying close attention and we have already made serious representations to the Vietnamese side.'³⁶

By way of response, on April 11th, Le Dzung, a spokesperson for Vietnam's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, stated that Vietnam has sufficient historical evidence and legal basis to confirm its sovereignty over the Hoang Sa (Paracel) and Truong Sa (Spratly) Islands. Dzung said Vietnam's operations conducted on its islands and territorial waters, including plot divisions, exploration and exploitation of oil and gas were 'completely normal'. They were, he said, 'in line with Vietnamese law as well as international laws and practices, particularly the 1982 United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea and the 2002 Declaration of the Conduct of Parties in the East Sea.'³⁷ Dzung also noted that Vietnam's partnership with BP dated to 2000 and 'is within Vietnam's exclusive economic area and continental shelf, and is within Vietnam's sovereignty.'³⁸ The Lan Tay-Lan Do field has been producing natural gas for power generation since 2002.³⁹

In April 2007, during the exchange of claims and counter-claims, Chinese naval vessels detained four Vietnamese fishing boats near Spratly islands and fined their crews (Office of the Secretary of Defense 2008: 11). And in June, as a result of Chinese pressure, BP announced it was halting seismic work off southern Vietnam until Sino-Vietnamese tensions subsided. Events took a turn for the worse on July 9, 2007 when an incident reportedly occurred between a People's Liberation Army Navy vessel and Vietnamese fishing boats near the Paracels resulting in the sinking of one Vietnamese boat and the death of one Vietnamese fisherman (Office of the Secretary of Defense 2008: 11).⁴⁰

³⁴Xinhua, *People's Daily Online*, April 10, 2007; for a slightly different rendition consult Reuters, 'Vietnam stirring trouble with gas pipe plan - China', April 10, 2007.

³⁵Xinhua, *People's Daily Online*, April 10, 2007.

³⁶Quoted by Reuters, April 10, 2007. Qin Gang's remarks were carried by the *Shanghai Daily* and *The China Daily* on April 11, 2007.

³⁷Thong Tan Xa Viet Nam, *Thanh Nien*, April 12, 2007.

³⁸*Thanh Nien*, April 12, 2007.

³⁹This area is separate from the area where the national oil companies China, the Philippines and Vietnam conducted joint seismic exploration; Voice of Vietnam, April 12, 2007.

⁴⁰Neither China nor Vietnam has provided a public account of this incident. It is unlikely that Vietnam People's Army naval vessels were involved in this incident. But it is highly possible that fishing vessels that form part of local security forces could have been involved. There is a real grey area concerning local self-defence forces and militia. It is even more likely

At the end of the year, PLAN exercises in the Paracel Islands from November 16-23, 2007 provoked Vietnamese protests (Sutter and Huang 2007d). A Foreign Ministry spokesperson declared that the Chinese naval exercises violated Vietnamese sovereignty and 'was not in line with the common perception' and spirit reached by leaders at recent high-level discussions in Singapore. Vietnam reiterated its sovereignty over the Paracel and Spratly islands but also called for a peaceful resolution of differences. China's Foreign Ministry responded by dismissing Vietnam's statement as unreasonable and as usual claimed 'irrefutable sovereignty' over both archipelagoes.

No action was more inflammatory than the reported decision of the National People's Congress to create Sansha city in Hainan province with administrative responsibility over three archipelagoes in the South China Sea, the Paracels, Spratlys and Zhongsa (Office of the Secretary of Defense 2008: 11 and Sutter and Huang 2007d).⁴¹ Vietnam's Foreign Ministry responded on December 4, 2007 by declaring the NPC's actions an 'encroachment' on Vietnamese sovereignty. The NPC's actions also provoked anti-China student demonstrations in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City on 9th and 16th December 2007.⁴² China immediately protested. Vietnam's Ministry of Foreign Affairs told China that the protests were spontaneous and not approved. ASEAN ambassadors were also called in and given the same message.

Early in the new year matters heated up when China accused twelve Vietnamese fishing boats of firing on ten Chinese trawlers in the Gulf of Tonkin on 7th January. Although there were no fatalities, several Chinese boats were hit by bullets. Vietnam dismissed Chinese allegations and replied that the incident was caused when fishing nets and tackles had become entangled.⁴³

In order to diffuse growing tensions, Vietnam and China convened the second meeting of the China-Vietnam Steering Committee on Cooperation in Beijing from January 23-25, 2008 (Sutter and Huang 2008a).⁴⁴ Vietnam was represented by Pham Gia Khiem, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and China was represented by Tang Jiaxuan, State Councillor. Khiem also conferred with his counterpart Yang Jiechi. The Steering

that armed Vietnamese fishermen were involved. China typically embellishes incidents to suits its purposes and its use of the expression 'armed vessels' is an example of such calculated ambiguity.

⁴¹*Mingpao* [Hong Kong], November 19, 2007 quoting an official of the Wenchang Propaganda Department, Hainan. Later another official on Hainan denied that this issue was on the NPC's agenda, 'Plan to designate islands a city denied,' *South China Morning Post*, December 19 2007.

⁴²Agence France-Presse, Hanoi, December 15, 2007.

⁴³Roger Mitton, 'Viet Minister Off to Beijing to Mend Fences,' *The Straits Times*, January 23, 2008.

⁴⁴The Vietnamese delegation included Deputy Minister of Defence Nguyen Huy Hieu who met separately with members of the Committee of Science, Technology and Industry, Ministry of Defence Hieu expressed an interest in deepening cooperation in personnel training, frontier and coastal defence and 'other fields'.

Committee discussed trade issues as well as 'sensitive and important matters related to [the] bilateral relationship in a frank manner, including border and territorial issues'.⁴⁵ Both sides agreed to sign a treaty on land border management regulations in future and to carry out a number of projects in less sensitive areas such as oceanic research, crime prevention and control, environmental protections and a joint survey of the water area off the Gulf of Tonkin.⁴⁶ Finally, both sides agreed 'not to further complicate the situation' and to 'properly handle problems in bilateral relations' through 'dialogue and consultations.'

The growing friction between China and Vietnam was addressed by a 'summit meeting' of communist party leaders who met in Beijing from May 30-June 2, 2008. A wide range of issues were discussed including trade and investment ties, science and technology cooperation and educational exchanges. The territorial dispute in the South China Sea was referred to obliquely in the official media as a problem 'left over from history'. A commentary in *Nhan Dan* on 30th May, for example, mentioned in passing the 'maintenance of stability in the East Sea'.

According to media accounts, at the summit, when Hu Jintao 'suggested a proper solution to existing issues between the countries on the basis of friendly consultations and mutual benefit', Nong Duc Manh replied that he shared Hu's views and that 'the two countries should communicate promptly about their concerns.' The two leaders agreed 'to build an exchange and co-operation mechanism between concerned agencies of the two Parties... and foster an effective co-operation mechanism between foreign ministries and agencies, national defence, public security and security forces'. The two party leaders also agreed that the most appropriate coordinating mechanism to handle their relations was the bilateral Steering Committee.⁴⁷

A joint statement issued after official talks between the two party leaders declared that China and Vietnam would base future cooperation in the Gulf of Tonkin on agreements reached in 2004 demarcating claims and fishing rights. The two leaders pledged to continue joint naval patrols and to conduct a joint survey of waters outside the mouth of the Tonkin Gulf. Hu and Manh also agreed to complete the laying of land border markers by the end of the year. However the most significant development in the joint statement was the

⁴⁵Deputy Foreign Minister Vu Dung, 'Boosting Vietnam-China ties for mutual benefits', VietNamNet Bridge, January 30, 2008. Dung is the general secretary for Vietnam on the Steering Committee.

⁴⁶Vietnam News Agency, January 23, 2008.

⁴⁷Hu also pressed his Vietnamese counterpart to agree on a five-year blueprint on trade cooperation. Both leaders witnessed the signing of agreements on veterinary and animal quarantine and plant protection and plant quarantine, and a credit contract for a nitrogenous fertilizer plant in Ninh Binh province.

decision by China and Vietnam to raise bilateral relations to the level of a strategic partnership and to establish a hotline between party leaders.⁴⁸

Immediately prior to Manh's visit to Beijing commercial satellite imagery was released to the public confirming that China was building a major naval base on Hainan Island. The high-resolution satellite photographs showed major surface combatants as well as a single nuclear submarine were stationed there. Other satellite imagery of piers and docks indicated that the Sanya Naval Base had the potential to accommodate large surface combatants including assault ships.

The development of Sanya Naval Base was paralleled by China's construction of an airfield at Woody Island in the Paracel islands, and consolidation of facilities at Fiery Cross Reef and the maintenance of a continuing naval presence at Mischief Reef both in the Spratly archipelago. In sum, China is rapidly acquiring an enhanced capability to exercise its sovereignty claims over the South China Sea and protect its vital Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) through the Malacca and Singapore Straits through which much of its energy resources flow.

Other construction indicates that the Sanya Naval Base will have strategic implications for the balance of power in the region. Portions of the base are being built underground to provide facilities that cannot be easily monitored. Satellite imagery has confirmed the presence of a Chinese Type 094 Jin-class submarine since late 2007.⁴⁹ The Type-094 submarine is a second-generation nuclear vessel and represents China's most lethal naval strike weapon. According to the U.S. Defense Department five more SSBNs could become operational by 2010. When the submarine facilities are completed they will provide China with the capability to station a substantial proportion of its submarine-based nuclear deterrence capabilities on Hainan. If China can develop the necessary operational skills its nuclear subs will be able to patrol and fire from concealed positions in deep waters off Hainan.

In August 2008, four Chinese-language websites carried an alleged Chinese plan to invade Vietnam. According to this document, 'Vietnam... is a major threat to the safety of Chinese territories, and the biggest obstacle to the peaceful emergence of China' and 'Vietnam has to be conquered first' if China wanted to exercise its traditional influence in the region.⁵⁰ In response, Vietnam twice summoned senior Chinese diplomats to its Foreign Ministry to

⁴⁸Full text of China-Vietnam Joint Statement, Xinhua, June 1, 2008. Vietnam has strategic partnerships with Russia, India and Japan and 'strategic relations' with France. Vietnam and the United States have both mentioned raising their bilateral relations to the strategic level.

⁴⁹The presence of a nuclear submarine, and potential future deployments, calls into question China's ability to sign the Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear-Weapon Free Zone in good faith.

⁵⁰'Invade Vietnam: Plan A', English-language translation of the 'thirty-one day invasion plan' posted on Chinese websites. I am grateful to Greg Torode for providing a copy of this document.

voice concerns about the possible negative impact on bilateral relations and to request the removal of the offending document from Chinese web sites.⁵¹

Conclusion

For several years scholars have been engaged in an on-going debate about how states in the Asia-Pacific Region are responding to China's rise. Generally, five major strategies have been identified: balancing, hedging, bandwagoning, engagement and omni-enmeshment (Kang 2003 and 2003/04, Acharya 2003/04, Roy 2005, Vuving 2005, Womack 2006 and Goh 2007/08).

There are two forms of balancing (Roy 2005). The first is external and involves collaboration by two or more states against a potential adversary. The second form is internal and involves developing defence self-reliance and national cohesion. Hedging is a general strategy and refers to keeping more than one option open. For example, a state may pursue a strategy of engagement while hedging at the same time. There are two forms of bandwagoning. The first involves alignment with potential adversary in order to ward off possible coercive measures. The second form of bandwagoning involves seeking economic gain by being on the 'winning side'.

The strategy of engagement refers to opening up multifaceted relations with another state in the expectation that the rewards of such a relationship will result in reciprocity and maintenance of the status quo. According to Roy engagement is a strategy whereby a state uses inclusion and rewards to attempt to socialize a dissatisfied power into accepting the rules and institutions of the pre-existing international order' (2005: 306) Finally, the strategy of omni-enmeshment refers 'to the process of engaging with a state so as to draw it into deep involvement in international or regional society, enveloping it in a web of sustained exchanges and relationships, with the long-term aim of integration' (Goh 2007/08" 120-121).

Vietnam has been put between a rock and a hard place over Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea in 2007-08. In terms of public diplomacy, China has repeatedly offered to observe the DOC and to settle outstanding matters peacefully. Yet in private China continues to exert diplomatic and military pressure on Vietnam to acquiesce to Chinese sovereignty claims in the South China Sea. Chinese pressures on international companies to cease assisting Vietnam in the development of off-shore oil and gas resources threatens to scuttle Vietnamese plans to develop its maritime area. In the face of these challenges what strategy is Vietnam pursuing?

The data in this paper clearly demonstrates that Vietnam is not pursuing a balance of power strategy in relation to China's rise. Neither is Vietnam bandwagoning with China in an effort to ward off possible coercion or to gain economic advantage. According to the then deputy head of the National

⁵¹Greg Torode, 'Vietnam Protests Over Chinese "Invasion Plans"', *South China Morning Post*, September 5, 2008, Jonathan Adams, 'Vietnam protests hawkish Chinese Web postings', *The Christian Science Monitor*, September 10, 2008 and Rowan Callick, 'China's netizens menace Vietnam', *The Australian*, September 11, 2008.

Assembly's External Relations Committee, Ton Nu Thi Ninh, 'everyone knows that we have to keep a fine balance' neither 'leaning over' toward the United States or 'bow[ing]' to China.⁵² There is evidence, not discussed in this paper, that Vietnam is pursuing a strategy of internal balancing by a modest effort to modernize its military forces and by maintaining national unity (Thayer 2008b and 2008c).

Vietnam appears to be pursuing a mix of engagement, omni-enmeshment and hedging strategies towards China. Vietnam pursues engagement primarily in its bilateral relations with China under the terms of the long-term cooperative framework agreement of 2000. Vietnam has attempted to manage and codify its relations with China through understandings reached at regular high-level meetings between party secretary generals and state presidents. Bilateral relations are broken down into issue areas and dealt with through joint working groups at expert, government and ministerial levels. These structures have resulted in a land border treaty, a treaty delimiting the Gulf of Tonkin and an agreement on fisheries cooperation. When the laying of the land border markers is completed this will represent a major confidence-building measure.

Vietnam also pursues a strategy of omni-enmeshment through membership in ASEAN and the Greater Mekong Subregion. China is one of ASEAN's dialogue partners. ASEAN and China have institutionalized their relations through a strategic partnership involving annual summit meetings of heads of state/government, the ASEAN-China Joint Cooperation Committee, ASEAN-China Senior Officials Meeting process, ASEAN-China political-security consultations, ASEAN-China Joint Working Group on the South China Sea and other mechanisms. ASEAN and China are presently pursuing a Free Trade Area.

ASEAN is also the core of other regional multilateral organizations such as the ARF that serve to manage relations with China. The Greater Mekong Subregion and the Mekong River Commission are weak institutional reeds in comparison to ASEAN or the ARF. China is not represented at the central government level but by Yunnan province and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Nevertheless, the GMS structure has provided a very important framework that facilitates extensive cross-border economic relations and infrastructural development. ASEAN and China have agreed to undertake joint action to develop the GMS. China is not a formal member of the MRC but has become a dialogue partner thus opening up another area for Vietnam to pursue relations with China through multilateral structures.

⁵²Quoted by Jane Perlez, 'U.S. competes with China for Vietnam's allegiance', *International Herald Tribune*, 19 June 2006.

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