

VIETNAM'S MARITIME POLICY THROUGH THE AGES***Dr. Nguyen Thanh Minh**

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Abstract

Maritime policy is understood as the specific strategies, plans, and measures aimed at successfully implementing the national strategy and guidelines for managing, exploiting, and utilizing the sea and islands. The strategies, plans, and measures of a maritime nation aimed at successfully implementing the guidelines for developing the marine economy and ensuring national defense and security at sea, international cooperation on maritime issues, maritime delimitation, and protecting and preserving the marine environment are outlined in the maritime strategy.

Keywords: Maritime policy, Vietnam.

INTRODUCTION

During the monarchical period, the maritime policy of the Vietnamese monarchy was formed by royal decrees reflecting regulations on the management and exploitation of the sea and islands. Today, Vietnam's maritime policy is comprised of official documents from the Party, State, Government, National Assembly, relevant ministries, departments, and coastal local authorities, as well as practical actions and guidance from the Party and State of Vietnam regarding the activities of organizations, forces, and the people in the process of state management of maritime affairs, protecting national sovereignty, sovereign rights, and jurisdiction, maintaining security and order in maritime areas, and utilizing and exploiting maritime resources. Therefore, throughout different historical periods, the content of Vietnam's maritime policy, as formulated and implemented by the Party and State of Vietnam, has varied and become increasingly comprehensive, adapting to the development conditions of Vietnam, the world, and the region, especially during the period of reform.

Vietnam's maritime policy during the monarchy period

Historically, Vietnam has gradually acquired and exercised its sovereignty over the entire maritime territory from North to South, stretching along the length of the country. Vietnam's maritime territory extends from MongCai, QuangNinh province to Ha Tien, KienGiang province. Vietnam has sovereignty over the entire system of islands in its maritime territory, including Tho Chu Island, PhuQuoc Island, Hon Nhan, Hon Khoai, and Hon Chuoi in the southwestern sea, and has had sovereignty over the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa archipelagos since the 17th century. The acquisition and exercise of sovereignty by the Vietnamese monarchy is a reality, continuous throughout history, peaceful, and in accordance with the principles of international law. Thus, it can be seen that throughout the history of nation-building and national defense, the Vietnamese monarchical dynasties have had a profound awareness of managing and utilizing the sea and islands, early implementing methods to exploit marine and

island resources, as well as taking appropriate measures to protect maritime sovereignty and paying attention to the role of maritime trade in the country's development. The above contents are considered important prerequisites for the formation and development of Vietnam's maritime policy throughout history. Monarchical states have early awareness of maritime sovereignty, such as maritime transport, marine economic exploitation, and the protection and enforcement of national sovereignty over sea and island areas. From the Early Le Dynasty, the State focused on defense in the sea and islands, thus deploying large warships to venture out to sea to manage the sea and island areas. The sea and islands were considered an important basis for building a naval force to defend the country. According to the Song Dynasty history of China, Song Gao, an envoy of the Song Dynasty sent to Dai Viet in 990, reported to the Song emperor that upon their arrival at the Giao Chi maritime border, King Le Dai Hanh dispatched nine warships and 300 soldiers to Liem Chau to meet them and escort them to the designated location. Thus, from the Early Le Dynasty, the Vietnamese monarchy paid attention to the development of maritime policy. This was evident in the development of a naval force to protect national sovereignty over the seas and islands. The content of maritime policy during the monarchical period was reflected in traditional maritime activities such as defense against foreign invaders from the sea, fishing, aquaculture, maritime patrols, and maritime management. These aspects are also crucial elements of maritime policy throughout the long history of Vietnam. Beginning with the era of independence and self-reliance from 938 to the monarchical dynasties of the Dinh-Early Le period from 968-1054, the Ly dynasty from 1054-1225, the Tran dynasty from 1225-1400..., Vietnam relied on islands and estuaries to fight against foreign invaders and protect national independence. The glorious victories that went down in Vietnamese history, such as the triumphant battles at these estuaries, clearly demonstrate this: Three great victories against the enemy on the Bach Dang River in 938, 981, and 1288; and the victory on the NhuNguyet River defense line in 1077. The victory at Rach Gam - XoaiMut in 1785 and the resounding victories of our army and people on the river and sea battlefields during the two resistance wars against French colonialism and American imperialism are indelible proofs that

will never fade from the history of the Vietnamese nation. Clearly, for Vietnam, the sea and islands play a crucial role in defense and the deployment of forces to resist foreign invaders from the sea throughout history. Historical events of the 16th and 17th centuries demonstrated that Vietnam's navy was well-developed, leading to victories against invading European capitalist fleets, such as defeating the Spanish colonial fleet in 1595 and twice defeating the Dutch colonial fleet in 1642 and 1643. During the Nguyen Lords' period, the content of the maritime policy was clearly demonstrated through the expansion of Vietnam's territory on land and in the islands towards the East and South. Specifically, Lord Nguyen Hoang, from 1558 to 1613, was an early recognizer of the important role of islands in national defense, security, and economic development in the South. Therefore, Lord Nguyen Hoang implemented a policy of territorial expansion southward. The ideas of Lord Nguyen Hoang were continued and developed by subsequent lords to a new level of significance in affirming maritime sovereignty, specifically by establishing the Hoang Sa and Bac Hai teams to manage the country's maritime territories and islands.

The Nguyen lords effectively implemented maritime policies such as surveying waterways, patrolling, inspecting, and controlling the country's sea and island territories, exploiting marine resources, and collecting artifacts from shipwrecks in Vietnam's sea and island areas. The Hoang Sa Team was established in the first half of the 17th century. Lord Nguyen Phuc Nguyen recruited people from An Vinh commune, Binh Son district, Quang Ngai province to go to the Hoang Sa archipelago to collect goods from shipwrecks and catch rare marine products to bring back to the court. The establishment of the Hoang Sa Team is one of the most important and vivid historical pieces of evidence affirming the sovereignty of the Vietnamese State over the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa archipelagos. From the 17th century, in addition to the coastal sea and islands, Vietnam implemented a policy of expanding into the East Sea to control and effectively exploit the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa archipelagos. These contents demonstrate the seafaring capabilities of the Vietnamese people, while also reflecting the will and strategic vision of the Vietnamese monarchical dynasties. Furthermore, the maritime policy during the monarchical period also addressed the importance of seaports. During this period, the Vietnamese monarchy decided to open two major trading ports, Van Don and Hoi An - Cu Lao Cham, to promote maritime trade with foreign countries.

Besides the Hoang Sa fleet, the Nguyen lords also established the Bac Hai fleet in the first half of the 18th century to strengthen the management and exploitation of the islands and seas. The Nguyen lords licensed people from TuChinh village, Canh Duong commune, BinhThuan prefecture to go to the Truong Sa archipelago to collect goods from shipwrecks and catch rare seafood to bring back to the court. In addition, the Bac Hai fleet carried out other important tasks such as collecting marine resources, surveying, planting trees, and erecting markers to affirm Vietnam's sovereignty over the Truong Sa archipelago. The naval forces were then fundamentally developed, so in the early 18th century, the ĐạiViệt navy defeated the British colonial fleet in 1702. During the TâySon period (1771-1802), the government paid more attention to maritime sovereignty and security. NguyễnHuệ vigorously developed the maritime economy and built a powerful navy, one of the strongest in Southeast Asia.

In fact, the TâySon navy repeatedly attacked and defeated the Nguyễn lords in ĐàngTrong and the Trịnh lords in ĐàngNgoài, ending over 200 years of national division. In 1785, NguyễnHuệ personally commanded the naval forces to attack and defeat the Siamese army at RạchGầm - XoàiMút in a historic strategic battle. Therefore, maritime policy during this period was primarily and clearly manifested in the concentration of resources on building and developing naval forces to fight foreign invaders on river and sea battlefields in order to protect the independence and territorial sovereignty of the Fatherland.

During the Nguyen Dynasty, the Nguyen emperors in the first half of the 19th century continued to implement many effective measures with concrete and vibrant state actions such as drawing maps of the islands; erecting sovereignty markers; building temples; planting trees and establishing tax collection stations on the islands; patrolling the islands to affirm sovereignty, while simultaneously exploiting and managing the islands to demonstrate the power of the Vietnamese monarchy over the territorial integrity and maritime boundaries of the nation. The exercise of sovereignty over the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa archipelagos was entrusted by the Hue court to the imperial navy and garrison, in coordination with local troops from Quang Ngai and BinhDinh provinces and fishermen, to carry out the task and report the situation to the court. Many important documents related to the islands were personally reviewed and approved by the emperor. This is one of the important aspects of maritime policy during the monarchical period, especially during the Nguyen Dynasty, with practical significance and profound value for the exploitation of the marine economy, affirming and enforcing Vietnam's sovereignty over its islands and seas.

It can be said that Vietnam's maritime policy was most clearly demonstrated during the Nguyen Dynasty. This was confirmed by concrete and practical actions regarding the islands and seas, such as: King Minh Mang directed patrol and resource exploitation activities in the southwestern sea region of the country, with important military bases such as PhuQuoc Island and Ha Tien in KienGiang province. A Nguyen Dynasty document dated June 27, 1830, the 11th year of Minh Mang's reign, records the event of a French ship in distress in the Paracel Islands being rescued by the Nguyen Dynasty's navy. On January 22, 1833, the 14th year of Minh Mang's reign, King Minh Mang issued an edict rewarding and punishing the survey team in the Paracel Islands. On July 13, 1835, the 16th year of Minh Mang's reign, an edict, also known as a Royal Decree, was issued concerning the survey of the Paracel Islands. The content of the decree was to dispatch a fleet of 24 sailors to the Paracel Islands to protect Vietnam's sovereignty over the archipelago. This was one of the important actions, with practical and vivid significance, demonstrating that the Nguyễn dynasty had clearly formulated its maritime policy, paying close attention to state management of Vietnam's offshore seas and islands, especially the Paracel and Spratly Islands.

In summary, the content of Vietnam's maritime policy during the monarchical period was planned and implemented in three main areas:

Firstly, establishing sovereignty over the seas and islands: Throughout Vietnamese history, the monarchical dynasties exploited and managed Vietnam's seas and islands, including the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa archipelagos. Particularly during

the Nguyen dynasty, the content of the maritime policy was concretized by the decision to establish the Hoang Sa and Bac Hai teams to manage and exploit marine and island resources. These details show that the maritime policy was clearly planned during the Nguyen dynasty. The policy clearly addressed the management and exploitation of resources in the seas and islands in general, and in the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa archipelagos in particular. This is considered important historical evidence for Vietnam to apply in the struggle to protect its maritime sovereignty. Furthermore, maritime policy during this period was also reflected in the specific actions of the government at the state level.

Secondly, building a naval force for maritime defense: Throughout its formation and development, the Vietnamese navy has always been invested in by the State to become a powerful military force capable of protecting the country's borders and maritime sovereignty. The navy was given significant investment by the monarchical dynasties in both quantity and quality. The history of Vietnam's resistance against foreign invaders shows that, during the monarchical period, the navy was not only capable of punishing pirate ships, but also defeated foreign ships that harassed, acted aggressively, and violated Vietnam's maritime sovereignty. Particularly during the third resistance war against the Mongol invaders in 1288, the army and people of Dai Viet, under the brilliant command of Tran Quoc Tuan, achieved a resounding victory on the historic Bach Dang River, annihilating the entire naval force of 60,000 men, capturing generals O Ma Nhi, PhanTiep, and Tich Le Co, and forcing ThoatHoan to withdraw his troops. Talented generals skilled in river and sea warfare such as Tran Khanh Du, Yet Kieu, Da Tuong, Tran QuangKhai, Tran NhatDuat, Nguyen Khoai, etc., made outstanding contributions, glorifying the naval warfare art of the Vietnamese nation. Vietnamese warriors of the monarchical dynasties had a tradition of excellent fighting on the sea and river, with close coordination between underwater and land forces. The naval battles on the rivers and seas were extremely glorious, and today they are summarized as the Bạch Đằng tradition of resistance against foreign invaders.

Thirdly, the development of maritime trade: The development of maritime trade began during the monarchical period. Although it is hardly mentioned in the chronicles of the Le-Trinh dynasty from 1592-1788, in reality, from shipwrecks in the Pandanum sea of the Philippines and Cu Lao Cham of Vietnam, we have now found tens of thousands of Chu Dau and Bat Trang ceramics from the 15th-16th centuries. Not only ceramics, but also through this route, the Vietnamese exported high-quality silk and fine raw silk. A large portion of this was sent to Malacca and from there was traded in many parts of the world. The most prominent example of the development of maritime trade was during the Nguyen Dynasty, from the Tay Son Dynasty to the Nguyen Dynasty, which implemented policies to develop maritime trade through various forms such as opening seaports, establishing trading posts, and holding fairs to encourage merchants from countries in the region and around the world to come to Vietnam for trade. Through maritime trade, the content of maritime policy during the monarchical period clearly demonstrated the establishment of sovereignty over the entire sea and islands of Vietnam, including the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa archipelagos. The contents of maritime policy and its implementation from the monarchical period have left many valuable historical lessons on policy planning and shaping methods of managing sea and

islands for the construction and implementation of maritime policy in subsequent periods, especially in the current context.

Vietnam's maritime policy during the French colonial period

Since France signed the Treaty of June 6, 1884, with the Nguyen Dynasty, historically known as the Paterot Treaty, France represented Vietnam's interests in foreign relations as well as in protecting Vietnam's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Within the framework of the commitments stipulated in the Treaty signed between the Nguyen Dynasty and France, France inherited and continued to exercise sovereignty over all the seas and islands of the Vietnamese monarchy, including the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa archipelagos.

France organized the exploitation of resources in Vietnam's seas and islands to serve its own interests. Economically, France took measures to exploit resources in the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa archipelagos as a nation inheriting the nominal sovereignty of the Vietnamese monarchy.

However, prior to the French arrival, the Vietnamese monarchies controlled all the islands, large and small, from North to South, including the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa archipelagos. After completing the annexation of Vietnam in 1884, France continued to assert and exercise sovereignty inherited from the Vietnamese monarchies over the entire sea and islands, including the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa archipelagos. In 1922, the Institute of Oceanography was established, and marine scientific research began. The French government organized numerous marine scientific research activities, conducted sea patrols to suppress piracy, organized coastal defense, established a trade network with foreign ships, and carried out rescue operations for ships damaged by storms and shipwrecks along the Vietnamese coast.

In 1925, 1926, and 1927, the French administration in Indochina conducted surveys of the Paracel Islands and maintained patrols around the archipelago. On December 9, 1926, the French administration issued a decree regulating fishing activities, stating that Vietnam's territorial waters extended 3 nautical miles. This document demonstrates the French administration's concern for the legal status of these maritime zones, creating a legal basis, or rather, regulations, for the exploitation of fisheries across all of Vietnam's seas and islands from North to South. In the field of defense and security, the French administration continued to inherit the sovereignty of the Vietnamese monarchy, thus deploying troops to occupy the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa archipelagos continuously in 1930 and 1933. Furthermore, to manage the sea and islands specifically and to clearly define jurisdiction, in 1933, France annexed the Truong Sa archipelago to Ba Ria province, and by 1938 established an administrative unit in the Hoang Sa archipelago belonging to ThuaThien province. In addition, the French administration implemented measures to protect, exploit resources, and conduct scientific research on the sea to affirm and consolidate Vietnam's sovereignty over the sea and islands, including the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa archipelagos. Simultaneously, France proceeded to exploit marine resources in general and explore and exploit oil and gas in particular. Oil and gas exploration in Vietnam began during the colonial era in 1930 in the Mekong Delta and in 1940 near QuyNhon. Thus, France inherited and consolidated Vietnam's sovereignty over the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa archipelagos.

Simultaneously, it expanded the maritime industry to exploit resources throughout the seas and islands, applying the colonial power's maritime policy to its colonies.

Vietnam is a coastal nation, but throughout the monarchical period, there were no detailed regulations regarding the width of its maritime territory, despite the emphasis on naval forces and maritime trade. Vietnam has historically been a maritime nation, with periods of significant foreign trade; during the Nguyen dynasty, there were patrol fleets, but there were no regulations concerning the width of its maritime territory. During its rule, France initially defined its territorial waters as 3 nautical miles, later 20 km (approximately 10 nautical miles) for all of Indochina. However, during the French colonial period, administrative regulations regarding the width of Vietnam's maritime zones were initially established. On September 22, 1936, the French government issued a decree defining Vietnam's fishing territorial waters as 20 km². In 1938, the French government further defined Vietnam's territorial waters as 3 nautical miles, with a fishing zone of 20 km² and a contiguous zone of 20 km² measured from the lowest low tide mark. Thus, from 1884 to 1945, through concrete actions, the content of Vietnam's maritime policy was clearly demonstrated by the French government in several key areas, such as expanding Vietnam's sovereignty, sovereign rights, and jurisdiction to all maritime areas recognized by contemporary international maritime law and international custom, except for the continental shelf which was not yet defined in the international maritime law system. In addition, the content of the maritime policy was also implemented by the French government in the field of national defense and security in the maritime and island areas, such as patrolling, inspecting, and controlling these areas to contribute to protecting Vietnam's sovereignty, sovereign rights, and jurisdiction over its seas and islands. From the content of the formulated maritime policy, it is evident that the French government inherited the task of protecting the maritime sovereignty of the Vietnamese monarchies. Furthermore, the policy combined the protection of maritime sovereignty and the development of the marine economy, particularly in the fields of mineral and fisheries exploitation, to serve France. The main contents of the maritime policy, as outlined in the documents analyzed above, show that the maritime policy during the French colonial period gradually inherited from previous Vietnamese monarchies. A crucial aspect of this period's maritime policy was the continued inheritance and affirmation of Vietnam's sovereignty over its maritime territories and islands, including the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa archipelagos.

Vietnam's Maritime Policy from 1945 to 1975

From 1945 to 1975, Vietnam experienced wars against numerous invading enemies, resulting in war devastation, division, and a lack of reunification. Therefore, the content of Vietnam's maritime policy during this period was fragmented, lacking unified planning and implementation. On July 26, 1945, the Potsdam Declaration affirmed the implementation of the Cairo Declaration's provisions. On August 15, 1945, the Japanese Emperor declared defeat, ordering the withdrawal of Japanese troops from Indochina. On August 26, 1945, immediately after Japan's surrender, Japanese troops withdrew from the Paracel and Spratly Islands, which were under Vietnamese sovereignty. France returned to Indochina, and the Vietnamese government, then headed by Emperor Bảo Đại,

took over and exercised sovereignty over the Paracel and Spratly Islands. However, from this point onwards, many new factors emerged, complicating the sovereignty dispute over these two archipelagos. From 1945 to 1955, the French government continued to define Vietnam's territorial waters as 3 nautical miles wide, with a fishing zone of 20 km² and a contiguous zone of 20 km² measured from the lowest low tide mark. In addition, the French government's maritime policy during this period focused primarily on developing the maritime economy, such as shipping and fisheries, to serve the needs of the mother country. Simultaneously, the French government deployed military forces to protect Vietnam's sovereignty over its entire sea and islands, including the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa archipelagos, through concrete actions such as patrols and inspections.

In 1956, after the French withdrawal from Vietnam, the Government of the Republic of Vietnam implemented a maritime policy with two basic components: developing the maritime economy combined with the task of protecting maritime sovereignty and islands. In addition, the Government of the Republic of Vietnam also focused on cooperation in oil and gas exploration and exploitation in the managed sea area. In 1956, when France withdrew from Indochina, while the Republic of Vietnam's army had not yet replaced them, the People's Republic of China took advantage of the power vacuum to illegally occupy the eastern group of islands in the Paracel Islands, which are under Vietnam's sovereignty. Furthermore, the content of the maritime policy in the field of international cooperation on maritime issues was also clearly defined by the Government of the Republic of Vietnam, such as participating in international conferences on maritime issues. Specifically, from February 24th to April 29th, 1958, the Government of the Republic of Vietnam participated in the First United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea in Geneva. At this conference, the Government of the Republic of Vietnam made important contributions to the development of concepts related to fisheries and the continental shelf.

In the administrative field, the Government of the Republic of Vietnam issued a Declaration on April 27th, 1965, on measures to protect the territorial waters of the Republic of Vietnam, stipulating a territorial sea width of 3 nautical miles. Simultaneously, it issued a Decree on June 19th, 1971, dividing the continental shelf in the southern waters of Vietnam into 33 blocks and proceeding with the bidding process for some blocks to foreign oil companies for exploration and exploitation. In reality, the content of the maritime policy formulated by the Government of the Republic of Vietnam during this period was still influenced by the US maritime policy, which was to maintain a territorial sea width of 3 nautical miles to ensure freedom of navigation: In 1971, the Government of the Republic of Vietnam stipulated a territorial sea width of 3 nautical miles, a fishing zone width of 15 nautical miles, and in 1972, it stipulated an exclusive fishing zone width of 50 nautical miles and a continental shelf according to the standards of the 1958 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. The US position on the width of the territorial sea being 3 nautical miles was aimed at limiting the sovereignty of coastal states, and this position of the US has been maintained to this day. During the time the Government of the Republic of Vietnam managed and protected the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa archipelagos of Vietnam, many important activities were carried out to protect sovereignty over the two archipelagos as well as to exploit the

resources on those archipelagos. Based on that, the main content of the maritime policy of the Government of the Republic of Vietnam was clearly defined in the field of investment and development of marine economic sectors. In particular, the Government of the Republic of Vietnam focused on several key areas such as maritime transport, logistics services, joint ventures in oil and gas exploration and exploitation, and port construction.

In 1973, the Government of the Republic of Vietnam issued its first tender for 13 blocks on the continental shelf in the southern waters of Vietnam, covering an area of 230,000 km². Following this, in May 1974, the Government of the Republic of Vietnam issued a second tender for 33 blocks, and 17 concessions were granted to nine foreign companies, including Sunning Dale, Mobil Oil, Esso, Pecten, Cities, Kayo, BHP, Union Texas, and Marathon. Prior to this, on January 12, 1974, taking advantage of Vietnam's concentration of forces to liberate the South and unify the country, China illegally occupied all the western islands of the Paracel Islands, which were under Vietnamese sovereignty at the time and administered by the Government of the Republic of Vietnam. Furthermore, the South Vietnamese government's maritime policy planning placed great emphasis on surveying, exploration, and exploitation of marine resources, especially oil and gas. This was also reflected in seismic surveys, specifically: During the period 1973-1975, the South Vietnamese government conducted seismic surveys and drilled six wells. The first well, Hong X1, drilled by Pecten International/Cities Service in August 1974, discovered a small amount of oil. The second well, Dua-1X, yielded 2,230 barrels/day and 17.6 million cubic feet of gas/day. At the end of January 1975, Mobil discovered the Bach Ho-1 oil field with a production of 2,400 barrels/day. The second field, Dai Hung-1X, was suspended due to technical reasons.

Overall, from 1956 to 1975, in the South, the Government of the Republic of Vietnam implemented a relatively systematic maritime policy. Specifically: In the field of maritime economy, investment focused primarily on developing sectors such as oil and gas exploration and exploitation, seafood exploitation and processing, logistics services, and maritime transport, and contributed to the development of an international legal framework for maritime affairs. In the field of national defense and security, the sovereignty of the sea and islands, including the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa archipelagos, was protected. However, in 1974, China illegally occupied the entire Hoang Sa archipelago, which is under Vietnam's sovereignty, by force.

In the North, the content of the maritime policy was part of the overall strategy, which focused on building socialism in the North and concentrating all resources on the struggle for the liberation of the South and the reunification of the country. From a legal perspective, the maritime policy of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam initially included provisions extending Vietnam's sovereignty, sovereign rights, and jurisdiction to all maritime areas recognized by contemporary international maritime law, except for the continental shelf. This was because the UNCLOS was only signed in 1982. Therefore, the Convention defined the concept of the continental shelf and its validity, and in practice, this content was applied by many countries to expand their maritime zones. In the field of marine economic development, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam initially formulated a strategic maritime

policy. Specifically, to train human resources for the marine economy, in 1956, the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam decided to establish the Maritime Elementary School and upgraded it to the Maritime University in 1976. This reflects the Party and State's viewpoint on training human resources for the development of the marine economy. Simultaneously, it reflects the strategic vision of the Vietnamese Government, which is to focus on the sea and build resources in the maritime sector. The content of maritime policy in the field of national defense and security has been carefully planned and effectively implemented to serve the resistance war against the US for national salvation. The greatest guiding principle for the maritime policy in the field of national defense and security of the Vietnamese Government during this period is expressed through President Ho Chi Minh's teachings in 1961. President Ho Chi Minh clearly stated: "Before, we only had night and forests. Today, we have day, sky, and sea. Our coastline is long and beautiful; we must know how to preserve it." President Ho Chi Minh's thought affirmed Vietnam's territorial sovereignty, encompassing land, airspace, and sea from North to South. During the resistance war against the US for national salvation, the focus of the maritime policy of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam was the protection of national sovereignty over the seas and islands to carry out the task of liberating the South. Specifically, the focus was on the defense sector, with particular emphasis on investing in the construction and development of the Navy to serve the resistance war against the US and the liberation of South Vietnam and national reunification. Accordingly, the State directed the building of a fleet of unmarked ships to transport weapons and troops to the Southern battlefield. In the cause of national liberation against the US, the Vietnamese army and people continuously achieved great victories on the river and sea battlefields, making a significant contribution to the liberation of South Vietnam and national reunification. In April 1975, during the Ho Chi Minh Campaign, the Vietnam People's Navy and local armed forces liberated several islands in the Spratly Islands, thereby further affirming Vietnam's sovereignty over the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa archipelagos.

In short, from 1945 to 1975, due to the circumstances of war and national division, Vietnam's maritime policy was not fully, consistently, and comprehensively expressed. Therefore, the content of maritime policy in the field of marine economic development and international cooperation on maritime issues was not implemented synchronously for comprehensive development. Consequently, alongside the outstanding achievements in the struggle to protect national sovereignty over the sea and islands, the process of formulating maritime policy during this period still had some limitations.

Vietnam's Maritime Policy from 1975 to 1986

In 1975, when Vietnam was reunified, its national position was increasingly affirmed on the international and regional stage. The international and regional context during this period underwent many changes and complex developments, with countries both within and outside the region gradually paying more attention to the sea and islands. Therefore, developing a maritime policy to ensure national defense and security in the sea and islands, while creating conditions for economic development, was an urgent requirement reflecting the country's reality. Therefore, from 1976 to 1986, Vietnam's maritime policy was initially formulated comprehensively across all important areas such as ensuring national defense

and security at sea, developing the marine economy, international cooperation on maritime issues, and maritime delimitation. Notably, the 4th Party Congress in 1976 identified two strategic tasks: building the country and protecting the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of the Fatherland; in 1977, the Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam issued a Declaration on the Territorial Sea, Contiguous Zone, Exclusive Economic Zone, and Continental Shelf of Vietnam, affirming Vietnam's sovereignty over the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa archipelagos. On November 12, 1982, the Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam issued a Declaration on the Baseline for Calculating the Width of the Territorial Sea, affirming its position, along with relevant parties, to resolve issues concerning the maritime zones and continental shelves of each side through negotiations based on mutual respect for independence and sovereignty, in accordance with international law and customs. To strengthen the protection of sovereignty over the seas and islands of the Fatherland, on February 12, 1986, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers issued Decision No. 13/HĐBT on strengthening the protection of sovereignty and security over the seas, islands, and continental shelf of Vietnam. This shows that, during this period, the task of protecting sovereignty and ensuring security over the seas and islands was one of the main contents of Vietnam's maritime policy. In summary, during this period, Vietnam's maritime policy addressed fundamental issues and contributed to driving the country's economic development. The initial maritime policy aimed to harmoniously combine economic development with the task of firmly protecting national sovereignty over the sea and islands.

Vietnam's Maritime Policy from 1986 to the Present

During the DoiMoi (Renovation) period, the complex international and regional context impacted the formulation of Vietnam's maritime policy. However, the Vietnamese Party and State formulated a comprehensive maritime policy across many important areas, providing a fundamental basis for its effective implementation, contributing to improving the lives of the people and firmly protecting national sovereignty over the sea and islands. The Sixth National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam in 1986 laid down a comprehensive reform policy, identifying the development of the maritime economy as the country's leading economic sector, opening up and integrating into the international economy, and carrying out the task of economic development combined with ensuring national defense and security. This has resulted in many historically significant achievements. These include strengthening the overall national strength, maintaining political and social stability, preserving independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and ensuring national defense and security in the country's maritime and island regions. The position and importance of developing the marine economy continued to be emphasized at the 8th to 14th Party Congresses. The Party's documents at these congresses set specific goals and tasks, clearly indicating the need to maximize the potential and advantages of the sea and coastal areas, combined with national defense and security; to build an export-oriented economic structure in the region, and to form marine economic centers. In addition, the plan included building large cities, industrial zones, export processing zones, coastal tourism and trade zones, with an expanded and newly constructed system of seaports, especially deep-water ports. Important policies regarding Vietnam's seas and islands

include the "Vietnam Maritime Strategy to 2020" (2007); and the "Strategy for Sustainable Development of Vietnam's Marine Economy to 2030, Vision to 2045" (2018). Resolution No. 26/NQ-CP, on "Issuing the overall plan and the 5-year plan of the Government to implement Resolution No. 36-NQ/TW dated October 22, 2018 of the Eighth Conference of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam, 12th term, on the Strategy for Sustainable Development of Vietnam's Marine Economy to 2030, with a vision to 2045"; Prime Minister's Directive No. 31/CT-TTg dated November 24, 2021, "On reforming and strengthening the implementation of the Strategy for Sustainable Development of Vietnam's Marine Economy to 2030, with a vision to 2045"...

Along with that, Vietnam's legal basis continues to be clearly demonstrated in Article 14 of the 1992 Constitution, which states that Vietnam "implements a policy of peace and expands exchanges... on the basis of respecting each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality, and mutual benefit." This viewpoint was also announced by the Vietnamese National Assembly on June 23, 1994, when it passed a resolution ratifying UNCLOS. Vietnam "advocates resolving territorial sovereignty disputes and other disagreements related to the South China Sea through peaceful negotiations in the spirit of equality, mutual understanding and respect, respect for international law, especially UNCLOS, and respect for the sovereign rights and jurisdiction of coastal states over their EEZs and continental shelves."

With its peaceful foreign policy, even before becoming a member of ASEAN, Vietnam expressed its support for the 1992 Declaration on the South China Sea. After joining and becoming a member, Vietnam has proactively played a role in the development of ASEAN, as well as in the process of building the DOC. The 1998 Hanoi Action Plan, in which Vietnam hosted the ASEAN Summit, emphasized the need for ASEAN to strengthen efforts to resolve disputes in the South China Sea through peaceful means, in accordance with international law. Since the signing of the DOC (Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea) in 2002, Vietnam has demonstrated a sense of responsibility, taking necessary flexible and adaptable steps, continuing its significant efforts to comply with its commitments under the DOC, while also urging relevant countries to fulfill their commitments under the DOC.

Based on existing legal documents, on June 21, 2012, the Vietnamese National Assembly passed the 2012 Law on the Sea of Vietnam, specifically regulating the legal regime of maritime areas and islands under national jurisdiction according to UNCLOS. Regarding the resolution of maritime disputes, Clause 3, Article 4 emphasizes "resolving disputes related to the sea and islands with other countries through peaceful means, in accordance with UNCLOS, international law, and practice." Through the promulgation of the 2012 Law on the Sea of Vietnam, Vietnam has expanded the means of resolving maritime disputes, instead of only affirming resolution through negotiation. Besides negotiation, Vietnam can use measures involving third-party mediation or employ judicial, arbitration, and court-ordered binding judgments to resolve disagreements at sea. This is seen as a development in Vietnam's perspective on resolving maritime disputes with neighboring countries.

Vietnam's basic stance and viewpoint on the East Sea issue and cooperation in maritime delimitation and dispute resolution with other countries can be summarized as follows: Affirming sovereignty over the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa archipelagos; persistently pursuing the path of resolving arising issues through peaceful means, on the basis of equality and mutual respect, through both bilateral and multilateral channels, based on adherence to international law, especially UNCLOS and ASEAN institutions; through negotiation and dialogue, aiming to find fundamental, long-term solutions that meet the legitimate interests of all parties involved for the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of the Fatherland, and for regional and international peace and stability. Practical experience in maritime delimitation cooperation between Vietnam and countries in the South China Sea region (Thailand, China, Indonesia) shows that all cases have been resolved on the basis of peaceful negotiations. Conflicts and disputes regarding maritime delimitation between Vietnam and countries such as Malaysia, Cambodia, and the Philippines are also in the process of being resolved on the basis of peaceful negotiations. This is entirely consistent with Vietnamese law and international law, especially UNCLOS.

Conclusion

Thus, the expanding theme of Vietnam's maritime policy is the combination of developing the maritime economy with firmly protecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country's seas, islands, and archipelagos. Ensuring national defense and security in the country's seas and islands is a crucial prerequisite for creating favorable conditions for the development of the maritime economy.

During the period of reform, the maritime policy has been formulated and implemented in many new areas such as international cooperation on maritime issues, agreements on maritime delimitation with relevant countries in the East Sea region, and forming policies to protect and preserve the marine environment. It can be seen that the development of Vietnam's maritime policy has demonstrated a comprehensive, systematic, and strong development in a synchronized manner towards the sea; reflects the positive attitude, determination, and commitment to respecting and implementing the provisions of UNCLOS; This demonstrates Vietnam's role as a responsible member of the international community, determined to strive for peace, stability, cooperation, and development in the region and the world. Responsibility within the international community, a determination to strive for peace, stability, cooperation, and development in the region and the world.

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