

Council: Special Defence Dialogue (SDD)

Country: Vietnam

### **Cooperation in Arms Procurement & Proliferation in Southeast Asia**

Despite once being ranked fifteenth on the list of top arms importers worldwide (International Trade Administration, 2024), Vietnam's arms imports have since dwindled significantly (Guarascio, 2024). This has largely in part risen from the increasing challenges of procuring weaponry from Russia without breaking US sanctions, upon which Vietnam is currently highly reliant, with negotiations concerning new arms deals also reaching an impasse (Guarascio, 2024). This, paired with territorial disputes in the region, especially the nine-dash line in the South China Sea, has exemplified the need for ASEAN nations to be self-sufficient in procuring arms to safeguard themselves from external threats.

Vietnam strongly urges member states to reduce their dependence on external arms suppliers and to enhance regional security and military interoperability, through the creation of a Regional Military Industrial Complex (RMIC) and arms standardisation within ASEAN.

Firstly, establishing arms standardisation across ASEAN member states is essential for uniform operational and logistical procedures, similar to NATO's Standardization Agreements (STANAG). ASEAN could create a regional body to develop and enforce these protocols, identifying critical domains, formulating guidelines, and facilitating adoption by member states. Such standardisation would facilitate arms sharing, streamline maintenance and logistics, and enhance technical interoperability across armed forces. For instance, during wartime, an Indonesian F-16C Fighting Falcon could resupply or land in Singapore or use bases in Singapore in case those in Indonesia are incapacitated due to enemy actions, as both countries operate this aircraft and have the necessary maintenance infrastructure to service it. This would enable cohesive joint exercises and operations, enhancing regional security and unity.

Establishing a Regional Military Industrial Complex (RMIC) would address the critical issue of overdependence on external arms suppliers, a current reliance that many ASEAN member states have on countries like the United States and Russia (Ooi, 2012). This dependence, while advantageous in some respects, can be prohibitively expensive and politically constraining. For example, despite supplying Ukraine with advanced weaponry like the M142 High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS), the United States has imposed restrictions to prevent escalation with Russia, frustrating the Ukrainian military and allowing Russia to consolidate forces without repercussions (POLITICO, 2024). Self-reliance in arms production would eliminate such limitations and the risk of foreign political interference. Moreover, an RMIC would reduce the costs associated with external procurement, stimulate economic growth, generate employment, and foster a self-sustaining defence industry within ASEAN. To achieve

this, ASEAN countries should invest in developing indigenous defence industries, create joint ventures, and collaborate with established global defence manufacturers to share expertise and expedite development.

## **Political Destabilisation in the Asia-Pacific**

The Asia-Pacific region has seen its fair share of political destabilisation in the most recent decade, with the Myanmar coup d'état being one of the most significant ones. Vietnam vehemently opposes any actions or policies that contribute to political destabilisation within our region. Vietnam believes that such political destabilisation in Asia-Pacific countries is an internal affair of said country, and stands resolutely with the ASEAN core principles of non-interference (ASEAN, 2020; Bich, 2022).

Hence, Vietnam strongly urges all fellow nations to resolve conflicts through peaceful dialogue before turning to military action and refrain from interfering in the politics of other countries. Vietnam hence proposes ASEAN to set up a mediation programme that functions similarly to the private dialogues held in Camp David. This ASEAN mediation programme shall serve as a private area where discussions with countries involved in such destabilisation can occur. This allows such countries to be able to settle their internal affairs privately with other mediators and strongly reflects the ASEAN core principle of non-interference (ASEAN, 2020).

Vietnam also vehemently opposes any and all forms of foreign political destabilisation, and unequivocally condemns any acts of foreign intervention in order to stabilise said country. Vietnam strongly defends the ASEAN core principle of non-interference of others' internal affairs (ASEAN, 2020), and the political destabilisation of a country would then constitute an internal affair. Besides, interference can break already existing diplomatic bonds, which can result in more political destabilisation than there already is, increasing the scale from country to region. One such example where such policies played out would be the Myanmar coup d'état, where Vietnam refuses to condemn its ruling regime for its violence against its people (Bich, 2022). Vietnam, however, has called for meaningful and inclusive dialogue in order to resolve the situation with the interest of the people of Myanmar (VnExpress, 2023). Given that Vietnam is the 7th largest foreign investor in Myanmar (Luan, n.d.), avoidance of interference such as the condemning of actions, has allowed Hanoi to sustain its friendly diplomatic ties with one of its important foreign investment markets. Hence, Vietnam believes in the effectiveness of the ASEAN core principle of non-interference of others' internal affairs (ASEAN, 2020), and the use of private dialogues to resolve said issues without conflict.

## **Establishing a Rules-Based Approach to Handle Disputed and Conflicted Waters**

As a nation with an extensive coastline and significant maritime interests, Vietnam is no stranger to disputed waters in the Southeast Asia region, particularly the nine-dash line. Ensuring freedom of navigation and overflight as well as upholding international law, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), is paramount for Vietnam (Nguyen, 2024).

Vietnam advocates for augmented cooperation amongst ASEAN members to address disputes in conflicted waters. This encompasses intelligence sharing, joint maritime patrols, and coordinated diplomatic efforts to resolve disputes amicably. Vietnam urges all parties involved in the South China Sea dispute to adhere to international law, particularly UNCLOS. Vietnam endorses all ongoing efforts to finalise the Code of Conduct (CoC) in the South China Sea (ASEAN, 2021) to manage tensions and prevent conflicts. Vietnam supports initiatives that foster dialogue and mediation in maritime conflict resolution, and believes that ASEAN should leverage its platforms, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) (ASEAN, 2024c) and the East Asia Summit (EAS) (ASEAN, 2024a), to facilitate constructive dialogue among stakeholders.

Vietnam is committed to collaborating with ASEAN members and other stakeholders to address the challenges of disputed and conflicted waters in the Asia-Pacific region. By strengthening regional cooperation, adhering to international law, promoting dialogue, and addressing non-traditional security threats, Vietnam believes that a stable and prosperous Asia-Pacific can be realised.

## **Space Economy**

Vietnam recognises the burgeoning potential of the space economy as a critical driver of innovation, technological advancement, and economic growth (World Economic Forum, 2024).

First and foremost, Vietnam supports the establishment of clear and fair regulations governing space activities. We urge for the development of an international legal framework that ensures the responsible use of space, prevents the weaponization of outer space, and addresses issues such as space debris management. Such regulations should promote equitable access to space resources for all countries, regardless of their level of development.

Vietnam also urges the international community to prioritise the prevention of space weaponization. This includes reinforcing existing treaties like the Outer Space Treaty of 1967, which prohibits the placement of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in space (UNOOSA, 1966). Moreover, new treaties should be negotiated to extend these prohibitions to conventional weapons and anti-satellite systems, thereby ensuring that space remains a domain free from conflict and militarization.

The accumulation of space debris has also posed a significant threat to the sustainability of space operations (The Aerospace Cooperation, 2024). Vietnam advocates for stringent regulations on space debris management, including mandatory debris mitigation measures for all space missions and active debris removal initiatives. International cooperation in developing technologies and best practices for debris mitigation is essential to preserving the long-term usability of space environments.

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