

## Vietnam Defense Strategy in Dealing with The South China Sea Conflict

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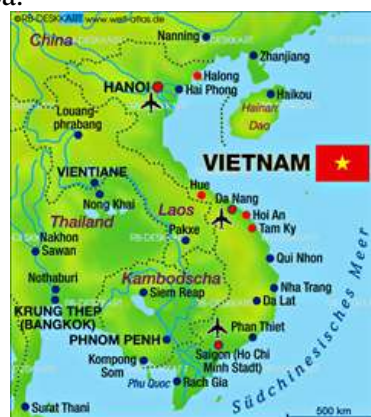
### Abstract

Vietnam is a country in Southeast Asia located on the Indochina Peninsula. The country has the full name of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and is a communist state that recognizes one party, the Communist Party. Vietnam's involvement in the South China Sea conflict has national interests as the basis for fighting over the territory. The South China Sea is currently in the spotlight because of the disputes there. The geographic location of Vietnam is at 80 North Latitude-240 North Latitude and 1020 East Longitude – 1100 East Longitude, with an area of 331,210 km<sup>2</sup>. The method used in this article is descriptive qualitative, in this article explaining Vietnam's sea defense strategy. Vietnam has a fleet of 9 frigates, 14 corvettes, 45 Paroli ships, 6 submarines and 8 warships. Based on this information, Vietnam's marine defense system is included in the Green Water Navy group. Then the potential threat of the South China Sea dispute that might occur was also brought to the ASEAN Forum to get support from ASEAN member countries. We can take the lesson that a country whose sovereignty is threatened will definitely make preparations and anticipate in carrying out defense and defense by strengthening its combat fleets.

**Keywords:** South China Sea, defense strategy, Green Water Navy

## INTRODUCTION

Vietnam is a country in Southeast Asia located on the Indochina Peninsula. The country has the full name of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and is a communist state that recognizes one party, the Communist Party. Vietnam is a member of ASEAN, APEC, the United Nations and institutions brought by the United Nations. Vietnam's territory borders the South China Sea, which is currently in the world's spotlight. Because the South China Sea region has islands which are strategic areas and have abundant natural resources. Geographically, the location of Vietnam is between 80 North Latitude-240 Latitude and 1020 East Long-1100 East Longitude. Vietnam is located at the eastern tip of the Indo-China Peninsula in Southeast Asia and is bordered by China to the north, to the northwest by Laos, to the southwest by Cambodia, while to the east and south by the South China Sea.



Pictures 1. Map of Vietnam  
Source Sindonesia.com

The territory of the State of Vietnam is 331,210 km<sup>2</sup> with a population of 97,338,579 inhabitants (2022). Most of Vietnam's population does not adhere to any particular religion or religion.

With the current conflict in the South China Sea, Vietnam also has national interests. The South China Sea is currently becoming a global concern due to disputes in that sea area. Disputes that occur in the South China Sea region cannot be separated from the national interests of the countries involved in the conflict. National interests are goals that must be achieved within a country (J.D Roseneau, 1968). In achieving the goals of state interests, foreign policy is formed.

Vietnam's involvement in the South China Sea conflict has national interests as the basis for fighting over the territory. Vietnam will defend its territory because in these waters there are abundant oil and gas natural resources. If Vietnam has and can control power over the area, it will certainly increase Vietnam's development and welfare.

Vietnam itself has made several efforts and strategies to secure its territory. As explained in the concept of energy security that the limited amount of energy in the world makes countries in the world try to find new energy sources so that this is what causes the phenomenon of energy security (Nugraha, 2011). All of this was done by the Vietnamese state solely to protect natural resources that would sustain economic resilience.

### **Threat Theory Balance**

According to the theory (Stephen, 2014) "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power", the meaning of these words is that alliances are seen as a response to threats. If a country enters the scope of the Alliance and acts as Stephen M. Walt said, namely balance and bandwagoning, these two words have different meanings. The balance in question is that the alliance of powerful nations will inevitably be balanced with threats. Furthermore, bandwagoning means an alliance against a state which is a threat to the state itself. The two concepts above are different from the reality because a country will feel safer when entering into an alliance with a country that has greater power than its own country and is able to face opposition forces and this is often done by different countries in the world. There are several factors that push countries to make alliances by distribution of power, shared ideology, and political will. Of the three, it is a supporting factor that influences and encourages a country to make an alliance.

### **Maritime Strategy**

According to Tori Corbett (2018), naval strategy needs to be understood and understood in the context of a more general maritime strategy which is only one part. As has been defined of maritime strategy as 'the governing principles of war in which the sea is a substantial factor, recognizing that only in the rarest of cases is war won by naval action alone. Naval strategy is part of the maritime strategy that determines the movement of the fleet when the maritime strategy has determined what part must be operated by the fleet in relation to the actions of land forces (Corbett, 2018).

The experience of the last hundred years shows that maritime strategy is part of the nation's grand strategy, which influences all activities and interests at sea. Naval strategy is not about fighting for the fleet. The maritime strategy includes broader opportunities, all uses of the country's sea, both economic and defense (Strachan, 2007). The use of all naval assets in this case the Integrated Weapons System (SSAT) to achieve military objectives such as capturing bases or territories, deterring, securing, fighting for territory and defending the command of the sea. Maritime strategy refers to the use of all maritime assets to fulfill a grand strategy with national policy objectives.

War at sea cannot be carried out without some geographical positions in the deployment of naval forces. Each of the warring parties will initially use their strength by using their geographical position. In the process of hostilities, each side will try to improve its existing

positions in order to win over new and more advantageous geographical positions. Likewise in coastal areas, it is also necessary to gain control over the sea and adjacent land areas (vego, 2018).

### **Naval Strategy**

Naval strategy and the concepts of maritime strategy are interrelated, as well as the overall strategy for achieving victory at sea. Execution of campaigns, movements and dispositions of naval forces in order to secure a battle advantage in a safe place from the enemy. Naval tactics are concerned with executing warship maneuver plans in battle. The purpose of the fleet in war must be able to keep its own country's coast free from enemy attacks, secure trade routes, and destroy enemy fleets. Then the next goal is the successful achievement of destroying and crippling the enemy fleet.

At sea is an area that cannot be occupied or occupied. Corbet (1954) emphasizes the interdependence of land and sea warfare and tends to concentrate on the importance of maritime communications rather than combat. Battle at sea is not an end in itself, the main purpose of a fleet is to secure its own communications and disrupt enemy communications, not having to seek and destroy enemy fleets (Corbett, 1854).

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

The method used is descriptive qualitative, a technique or method used to explain more about the use of data and other written sources. This article is expected to be able to reveal various qualitative information with descriptions. This article focuses on explaining Vietnam's maritime defense against threats in the South China Sea. The data obtained is data from literature studies and secondary data in order to describe Vietnam's marine defense system. It is hoped that this article can provide insight and knowledge about Vietnam's Marine Defense Strategy which is prepared to deal with threats in the South China Sea.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Threat Perception**

Based on the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), countries that have territorial waters can claim Zee which includes 200 miles of coastline of the outermost islands (Kim, 2012). One of the problems and potential threats to the realization of trade in Southeast Asia is the South China Sea conflict. Conflicts in the South China Sea arise when there are overlapping territorial claims by several countries, including Vietnam. The territory claimed in the South China Sea has strategic value, this dispute will be more complex because of the strategic value possessed by the Spratly Islands. Based on the data, it is proven that the Spratly Islands have a wealth of natural resources, in addition to their geographical location being a strategic area for international shipping.

In 2009, the Vietnamese government submitted a report that Vietnam's continental shelf boundary was extended in two areas for consideration by the Continental Shelf Commission (Hanh, 2012). Efforts to expand this claim resulted in changes to the boundaries of Vietnam's territorial sovereignty which were originally determined by the "baseline" in the declaration of the vietnam sea area declaration, on May 12, 1977. The following is a map of Vietnam's

sovereign territory after sovereignty claims were expanded to include the Paracel Islands and Spratly Island:



Pictures 1.2 Border Claims by Vietnam  
Australia Plus ABC

While Vietnam has made claims to the Spratly Islands, China has also made claims to the islands, because China has a fairly high population and will do the distribution of its population in the Spratlys in terms of population growth. But it will be different when viewed from a defense and security perspective, China wants the islands for ship traffic and its oil transport fleet. For Vietnam, the Spratlys are considered economical because they can produce the oil and gas resources needed to support their economy. In terms of defense and security, the islands are a security base for Vietnam, on the other hand they are strategic routes for foreign ships which will facilitate economic development.

The emergence of claims from the Chinese state regarding the South China Sea including the Spratly Islands is an emerging threat to the Vietnamese state, because Vietnam is geographically closer to the islands. Then Vietnam will be able to defend the area. In addition, Vietnam maintains the territory to support the economy for Vietnam's welfare.

### **Sea Defense Strategy**

Maritime strategy is the overall strategy for achieving victory at sea, including the planning and execution of campaigns, movements and dispositions of the Navy by seeking the advantages of fighting somewhere. In December 2019, Vietnam's Ministry of Defense issued an official book entitled Vietnam National Defense 2019. This book describes Vietnam's national strategy called the strategy to protect the motherland.

This strategy aims to identify objectives, joint forces, and consider feasible solutions to deploy all forces to defend the motherland, determine the National Defense Strategy Planning, military strategy, national security strategy, diplomatic strategy, and other sectoral strategies.

Vietnam is also making efforts to upgrade and modernize its military to prevent China from claiming disputed areas in the South China Sea. In response to China's militarization of the South China Sea, Vietnam is trying to balance its strength and military capabilities. Vietnam is working to build (A2/AD) Anti-Denial Access submarines including a Russian-made killer-class submarine equipped with Bastin-P Anti-Access Plus stationed on the coast of Vietnam.

### **Vietnam Naval Fleet Strength**

Based on the electronic media news source, Sindonews, Thursday 08 December 2022, Vietnam's navy consists of 9 frigates, 14 corvettes, 45 Paroli ships, 6 submarines and 8 warships. Based on this information, Vietnam's marine defense system is included in the Green Water Navy group. In a war between two powerful opponents, the sea control dispute is a very dynamic process. On the coast, the strategic situation will be largely determined by the extent and intensity of the war on land. Corbett observes that in the control of war at sea disputes usually occur (Corbett, 2018). The struggle for sea control occurs when the two opposing parties have

approximately equal power and opportunities to gain control of the sea in the entire theater or in one of its parts (Corbett, 2018). Inferior powers can successfully maintain sea control by adopting a strategic defensive stance by exploiting geographical conditions.

Alfred Thayer Mahan is a general who served at West Point, United States, he is one of the authors of a study strategy with his book entitled "The Influence of Sea Power Upon History 1660-1783". In his book it is explained that events at sea greatly affect events on land. Mahan also explained that sea power is a very important element for the glory of a nation.

From this theoretical and understanding of sea power, Vietnam seeks to strengthen its fleet by rejuvenating its defense equipment and increasing the number of its fleet to deal with threats in the event of a conflict in the South China Sea. The marine power component in Vietnam currently includes all movers and those engaged in the maritime world. In 2011, the Vietnamese navy conducted joint exercises with the United States with the aim of increasing Vietnam's combat and defense capabilities. In addition, Vietnamese oil and gas company PetroVietnam has cooperated with oil companies from the United States and other major countries with a view to strengthening Vietnam's claims over disputed areas (Ciorciari and Weiss, 2012: 64)

## CONCLUSION

Based on previous explanations and discussions, it has been explained that there have been claims to the border area between Vietnam and several countries that have interests in the South China Sea area because it is a strategic world trade route and it is believed that there are lots of natural gas and oil in the area. Vietnam's claim to the Spratly and Paracel Islands is of national interest to the region's energy.

Vietnam's claim to the South China Sea area led to China also claiming recognition of rights to the area, which resulted in the area being disputed. A week after China announced its claims to the South China Sea, Vietnam began joint exercises with the United States and established ties with India. Form cooperation and joint exercises in order to balance China's power. In addition, Vietnam is also increasing the development and development of weapons and military equipment, including the development of Anti-Aces Anti-Denial (A2/AD).

Vietnam's navy consists of 9 units of frigates, 14 units of corvettes, 45 units of Paroli vessels, 6 units of submarines, and 8 units of warships. Based on this information, Vietnam's marine defense system is included in the Green Water Navy group. Vietnam's naval strength is prepared if there is a conflict in the South China Sea, the Vietnamese navy is ready to carry out security in its territory. We can take the lesson that a country whose sovereignty is threatened will definitely make preparations and anticipate in carrying out defense and defense by strengthening its combat fleets.

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