



The New Geopolitics of the East Sea toward 2030 and Implications for Vietnam: A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

The East Sea is the connection point of many vital maritime and air routes, where the interests of many countries and territories are intertwined. Peace and stability in the East Sea have a direct influence on the peace and stability of the region and the world. The issues of conflict and escalation in disputes in the East Sea recently have become increasingly complicated and unpredictable, becoming a common concern of many countries inside and outside the region. For the participating countries, the benefits brought by the East Sea are reflected in all four layers: (1) in the air (air defense identification zone), (2) on the surface (maritime traffic, sovereign rights attached to the sea, the islands), (3) in the seabed (aquatic products), (4) at the bottom of the sea (oil and gas resources), creating different benefits for the parties involved, intertwined and extremely complicated. The objective of the article is to review the research situation on issues related to the East Sea, including studies on competition and cooperation in the East Sea, policies of relevant countries towards the South China Sea area. East Sea, thereby finding gaps that need to be further researched in order to complete the knowledge of studying the East Sea more fully.

KEYWORDS: East Sea dispute; Cooperation; East Sea Policy; Competition.

INTRODUCTION

In the first decade of the 21st century, the East Sea issue is basically regional with disputes over sovereignty and resource exploitation between China and other sovereign states. This period also witnessed the U.S start to actually get involved in the East Sea, especially after the plane crash of the two countries right over the East Sea (the 2001 Hainan island incident). ASEAN's role has also emerged in ensuring peace and stability in the South China Sea through (multilateral) negotiations with China (through the DOC in 2002, as well as a series of joint statements at the ARF forums). Entering the second decade of the 21st century, the context of the East Sea is shaped by strong internationalization. Since the B. Obama presidency, the United States has advocated an "active engagement" approach in the East Sea, aiming to balance forces in the region and in the Asia Pacific. China openly expressed their ambition to challenge the U.S order. Therefore, the East Sea has become a collision point between the two great strategies of these two leading powers. Other powers (Japan, EU, Russia, India...) also have their own policies and strategies for the East Sea. ASEAN continues to play an active role in ensuring peace and stability in the region, however, the competition for influence of the U.S - China. Participating in sovereignty disputes (Laos, Thailand, Cambodia) also divided the organization (for the first time,

ASEAN failed to issue a joint statement at the 2012 Foreign Ministers Meeting).

As a coastal country, whose coastline lies entirely in the East Sea, has indisputable sovereignty over the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa archipelagoes, associated with economic and security interests. At the core, Vietnam soon realized the importance of the East Sea issue, and at the same time set out a maritime strategy, along with practical implementation solutions. Based on the above awareness, it is necessary to conduct research on the international context for the East Sea from 2023 and toward 2030 to clarify current outstanding issues in both political and economic aspects.

SOVEREIGNTY DISPUTE ISSUES IN THE EAST SEA

The issues of sovereignty and sovereign rights disputes taking place in the East Sea have become the main topic of many studies on conflicts in the East Sea.

Khanh (2012) clarified the interaction between political and geographical factors in establishing a power order in a different space, defined territorial space, namely the policy of major powers in using the geographical position and strategic situation in the East Sea as a means or resource to realize political goals in the Southeast Asia. Nam (2012) provided three basic bases for analyzing the current situation and characteristics of conflicts in the East Sea,



including: (1) historical, geographical and international legal evidence that relevant parties have presented to prove their sovereignty and sovereign rights in the East Sea; (2) from an international political-security perspective to study the possibilities of conflict and assess the risks for each country, region and international relations; and (3) from an economic perspective to study and assess the economic potential of the East Sea in shipping, in the exploitation of the sea's natural resources.

Huang and Billo (2015) provided in-depth analysis of the complexities of ongoing territorial disputes in the South China Sea region through multiple stakeholder perspectives. Bringing together perspectives from seven countries, the contributors are eminent scholars on both sides of the Pacific. Supriyanto (2017) on the topic "Indonesia's South China Sea Problem" analyzed Indonesia's problems in the South China Sea. Supriyanto believed that the current issue in the East Sea poses a challenge for Indonesia at a time when it is least expected. The crisis came at a time when Sino-Indonesian relations were on the rise and when ASEAN, the so-called "foundation" of Indonesia's foreign policy, was undergoing a deeper integration and broader to become a community. Nalanda Roy (2016) "The South China Sea Agreement: past, present, and future" provided political and economic analysis of current controversies in the South China Sea. The author examines longstanding territorial disputes, competing maritime claims, and the historical origins of disputes in the region.

Rustandi (2016) "The South China Sea Dispute: Opportunities for ASEAN to enhance its policies in order to achieve resolution" focused on assessing the ongoing disputes in the East Sea to identify opportunities for ASEAN to strengthen its policies to achieve solutions. The author also notes that China's longstanding disputes with several coastal states have resulted in an environment that is not conducive to peaceful resolution.

Peter Kreuzer (2018) argues that the conflict between China and the Philippines has attracted received the most international attention in years until July 2016, because the Philippines took the unprecedented step of expanding its conflict with China into the international judicial arena in 2013 when Philippine sued Beijing's illegal nine-dash line to the International Court of Arbitration. The issue of disputes in the East Sea is also recognized by Macaraig and Fenton (2021) that the East Sea dispute illustrates the confluence of competing interests on an international scale.

The most recent report of the US Congressional Research Service (CRS Report, 2023) on "US-China Strategic Competition in South and East China Seas: Background and Issues for Congress" stated that in the context of competition among the major powers, the East Sea has emerged as an arena of strategic competition between the United States and China. China's actions in the East Sea—including island-building activities and construction of facilities at Chinese-occupied sites in the Spratly Islands, as well as actions by

maritime forces aimed at asserting China's claims against regional neighbors such as the Philippines and Vietnam—reinforced concerns among the U.S. observers that China is gaining power to control over the East Sea.

COOPERATION ISSUES IN THE EAST SEA

Research works on this issue are quite diverse with many different approaches and research scopes, most of which focus on the form of cooperation between ASEAN countries to resolve sovereignty disputes in the East Sea, maintaining peace, security, stability and development in the region. Refuge (2010) raised three main issues: (i) The importance of the East Sea in the region as well as globally in the overall context of the international environment. (ii) Recent developments in the East Sea and its implications for peace, stability and cooperation in the region. (iii) Forms and measures of cooperation in the East Sea, experiences and prospects in cooperation in the East Sea between countries in order to maintain peace, stability and development in the region. News (2014) provides an overview of cooperation activities to promote security and peace in the region, the views of some countries on the issue of cooperation in the East Sea with a multi-dimensional view, from the subjects participating in the cooperation process to the form of cooperation.

Khanh (2022) contributes to solving scientific and practical issues of cooperation in the East Sea in the first two decades of the 21st century. Approaching from the perspective of Constructivism, the book has clarified the issue of cooperation in the East Sea base on approaching the existing initiatives and cooperation models in the East Sea, assessing the advantages and limitations of the East Sea.

Hoa (2011) clarified the main issues in cooperation, the nature of cooperation and the prospects for security and defense cooperation in ASEAN. Although there is no specific analysis, Hoa also pointed out that since 1992, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia have cooperated against piracy in the Strait of Malacca. Discussing ASEAN's security cooperation, Tho (2011) analyzes the nature, content and level of defense and security cooperation within ASEAN and between ASEAN and external partners.

Regarding the maritime security of a small area in Southeast Asia, Hung (2006) and Tuong (2011) clarified the important strategic position, security issues as well as the interests of countries outside the region. The challenges and cooperation in maritime security pointed out are mainly piracy issues. Vinh (2019) has assessed non-traditional security issues at sea in Southeast Asia. Accordingly, with an important geopolitical and geo-economic position, Southeast Asia with its vast maritime space, which has been a competitive area for many forces in history, continues to face many security challenges, including non-traditional security challenges such as terrorism at sea, piracy, light arms smuggling, drug trafficking, human trafficking, goods smuggling, marine pollution, natural disasters at sea.

REGARDING THE VIEWS AND POLICIES OF COUNTRIES ON THE EAST SEA ISSUES

Anh (2012) pointed out that the U.S foreign policy in the East Sea focuses mainly on protecting the interests of the U.S and its allies, the U.S wants favorable development in the East Sea, not an armed conflicts; The U.S wants to maintain a balanced relationship with coastal countries in the region. However, the U.S policy in the East Sea has changed more or less in the two periods before and after the 2008 world financial crisis. Anh (2012) also compared the South China Sea policy of the G. Bush administration with B.Obama government to spend the adjustment of the East Sea strategy of the two periods.

Zhang (2013) analyzed Singapore's position on the South China Sea issue. As a non-claimant state over the South China Sea disputes, Singapore has interest in the development and handling of the regional hotspot issue. Singapore's policy on the East Sea issue has been fairly consistent over the past decades. One area of particular concern for Singapore is freedom and safety of navigation. Singapore has also strengthen maritime security in the region. Many of the proposals and programs that Singapore has supported could be taken more seriously to further improve maritime security in East Asia. Cuong (2019) pointed out the strategic interests of both China and the United States in the East Sea area (with more focus on the U.S). Accordingly, the East Sea is one of the crucial geostrategic areas, related to the interests of many countries inside and outside the region, where the military power of many countries is displayed and expanded in competitive region, gaining strong influence among the major powers, most notably the United States and China. For China, the South China Sea is strategically, economically and militarily important for the expression of China's ambitions in its efforts to expand its sphere of influence to the southern region. For the United States, in order to deal with new challenges in the East Sea, the United States has changed its thinking about the "sea power strategy" and set new goals for the U.S Navy. One of those goals is that the United States focuses on developing the strength of its Navy and considers it a pillar in maintaining the United States' leadership role in regions of the world. The U.S. maritime security strategy also articulates major goals, including: protecting freedom of navigation, preventing conflict, coercion, and promoting compliance with international laws and norms. Drifte (2016) analyzed Japan's various interests in the South China Sea region, and how the Japanese government tries to address them in the complex political, strategic, and legal context.

In another study on Japan's South China Sea policy, Envall (2022) stated that Japan is not a direct party to any disputes in the South China Sea, nor does it have any claim to it exclusive economic zone. However, Japan has vital interests in the region. Envall (2022) examines Japan's position on the South China Sea from three perspectives. First, this study questions why the South China Sea is important to Japan's national interests. Then, lay out Japan's strategic goals in

the region. Finally, consider the risks and uncertainties that Japan faces in pursuing these goals. Although Japan is an important stakeholder, the East Sea dispute highlights Japan's limitations, including limitations on self-imposed policy and capacity gaps, as well as geographical vulnerabilities. The political and geo-economics facing Japan in the Indo-Pacific.

REGARDING VIETNAM'S VIEWS AND POLICIES ON THE EAST SEA ISSUES

The issue of maritime and island disputes in the East Sea will be a challenge. The struggle to protect the sovereignty of the sea and islands will also have to be "long-term resistance"(Huong, 2021). Vietnam needs to combine the strength of great national unity with legal struggle based on international law and the support of a profoundly changing world. Therefore, enlisting the world's support is a strategic issue, combining diplomacy and legality. For conflicts in the East Sea, military power will be used to prevent the situation from getting worse, while diplomatic and legal struggles are proactive to win the righteous victory, taking advantage of the support. international conflict. Anh (2022) has pointed out the important role of firmly protecting the sovereignty of sea and islands in the sustainable development of Vietnam. The idea of protecting the sovereignty of the sea and islands was reaffirmed in the 13th Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam. Anh (2022) has shown that the Communist Party of Vietnam always considers the protection of sea and island sovereignty as one of the important contents in the strategy of national defense in general and socio-economic development in particular towards the goal of becoming a country of sustainable development, prosperity, security and safety. Those thoughts and views of the 13th National Congress have shown that the strategy of protecting sea and island sovereignty is suitable for the current context. Those ideas are the basis for solving challenges and integration, sustainable development and maintaining the sovereignty of the sea and islands of the Fatherland.

CONCLUSION AND EVALUATION OF THE RESEARCH RESULTS

The East Sea issues have been studied in the region and around the world. With a few exceptions, the research works have quite balanced and objective views when analyzing and explaining the situation of the East Sea, the disputes in the East Sea, the causes and the characteristics of the cycle of disputes, solutions in disputes, issues of the Law of the Sea, efforts to maintain security, stability and peace in the East Sea and many other related issues.

In general, the number of studies has increased rapidly recently, which also reflects the importance of the East Sea as well as the increasing level of disputes and strategic competition. Non-traditional security in the East Sea is on the rise. These studies have many different viewpoints, this comes from the positions and perspectives of research in different positions when assessing the policies of countries towards the East Sea.

In general, the research on East Sea issues, although increasing, is still quite modest, most of which pay more attention to conflict issues and conflict resolution in the East Sea, while other research on the context of economic competition and non-traditional security challenges in the East Sea is still quite limited. Therefore, this can be considered as a research gap in Vietnam that needs to be filled with systematic and in-depth studies.

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