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Article

Vietnam's Foreign Policy Reform (1986-2025): From Breaking Isolation to International Integration and the Era of the Nation's Rise

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Abstract

This article provides a comprehensive analysis of Vietnam's foreign policy renovation and development within its Doi Moi process since 1986. The study primarily focuses on elucidating how Vietnam has transformed from an isolated nation, grappling with numerous challenges, into a proactive and active participant in the international arena. The initial phase of breaking isolation is examined through Vietnam's efforts to overcome political and economic barriers, establishing relations with a wide range of nations and international organizations. This was followed by a period of extensive international integration, evident in Vietnam's accession to key multilateral institutions, alongside the expansion of its strategic and comprehensive partnerships. Finally, the paper highlights the era of the nation's ascendancy, describing how Vietnam, with its escalating position and prestige on the global stage, actively contributes to regional and global issues, pursuing an independent, self-reliant, diversified, and multilateral zed foreign policy. This study not only summarizes key achievements but also analyzes the challenges and future orientations of Vietnam's foreign policy.

Keywords: *Vietnam, Doi Moi, foreign policy, international integration, era of the nation's rise*

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Introduction

Foreign policy renovation begins with a fundamental shift in perception and mindset. It leads to new policies and implementation methods, paving the way for a strategic transition, resolving difficulties, generating new resources, new impetuses, and a new international posture. Innovative thinking is the genesis for all new development processes in this context. Notably, states pay particular attention to renovating foreign policy thinking, which is reflected in their doctrines, strategic documents, and foreign policies across different periods. Evidence suggests that all nations must constantly monitor, analyze, and forecast major global trends concerning war and peace, their self-positioning within the international order, their strategic space, and identify allies and adversaries. This comprehensive assessment allows them to establish specific strategic foreign policy directions for each stage, ultimately safeguarding their national interests [19].

In Vietnam, foreign policy renovation has consistently been a central pillar of the Communist Party of Vietnam's leadership strategy. Throughout Vietnam's revolutionary history, the success of its foreign policy renewal has stemmed from a keen understanding of global dynamics, accurately identifying and seizing opportunities at each specific stage of the revolution and clearly distinguishing between partners and adversaries. This approach has enabled Vietnam to garner support from its domestic population and international allies, leveraging its position and strengths to safeguard the nation's achievements. Since its inception in 1986, the comprehensive reform process initiated by the Communist Party of Vietnam has yielded significant, historically meaningful accomplishments, laid a robust foundation, and provided strong momentum for the cause of building and defending the socialist homeland. Foreign policy renewal, particularly through transforming policies and diplomatic activities, constitutes a critical component of Vietnam's broader reform agenda.

While the renovation of thinking by the Communist Party of Vietnam in the 1980s stemmed from the imperative to extricate the nation from a severe socio-economic crisis and international isolation, the subsequent period marked a proactive conceptual shift aimed at seizing new opportunities and fostering development in a globalized world. This evolution in strategic thinking transitioned from an inward-looking, domestically focused reform agenda to a gradual yet firm integration into regional and global frameworks. Vietnamese foreign policy underwent a significant transformation, moving from extensive, broad-based relationships towards increasingly profound and substantive engagements. Its primary focus shifted from security to development and enhancing national standing. This change was

accompanied by a shift in mindset, evolving from mere participation to proactive contribution, shaping, and even leading international discourse and initiatives.

Through this renewal process, Vietnam's foreign policy has played a pivotal role in preemptively safeguarding national sovereignty, territorial integrity, and security and building and consolidating a favorable and stable political, economic, and external environment. Concurrently, it has effectively leveraged all available resources for national development while elevating the country's international standing and prestige. This paper will comprehensively analyze and evaluate the evolution of Vietnam's foreign policy from 1986 to 2025, elucidating its distinct developmental stages and achieved milestones. Based on the research findings, the paper will propose scientifically grounded and practically relevant recommendations to further refine and advance Vietnam's foreign policy in the coming period, particularly amidst the increasing complexity of global and regional challenges.

Literature Review

Since Vietnam initiated the Doi Moi reforms in 1986, its foreign policy's continuous and comprehensive transformation has unfolded. Vietnam's new foreign policy reflects a commitment to independence, self-reliance, multilateralism, and diversification, all rooted in national and ethnic interests. This strategic shift has yielded significant achievements, elevating Vietnam's regional and global standing, enhancing its international prestige, and facilitating its integration into the global community. Consequently, Vietnam's foreign policy transformation has garnered substantial scholarly attention across various dimensions.

This paper is built on several related works, categorized as follows:

First, primary sources include documents outlining the guidelines, policies, and positions of the Communist Party of Vietnam and the Vietnamese state. The evolution of Vietnam's foreign policy is consistently documented in the proceedings of the 6th to 13th National Congresses of the Communist Party of Vietnam, which align with the Doi Moi reforms and Vietnam's regional and global integration [1-11].

Second, a body of research examines the trajectory of Vietnam's foreign policy transformation across different periods. These studies often focus on Vietnam's efforts to overcome international isolation and embargoes [18, 20, 25], its pursuit of regional and global integration [12, 13, 14], and its transition into a new era of national development [24, 26]. Collectively, these works elucidate the characteristics and dynamics of Vietnam's foreign policy shifts during specific developmental phases.

Third, a group of studies explores specific facets of Vietnam's foreign policy transformation. These include Vietnam's efforts to build strategic trust in its relations

with countries worldwide [12], which underpins its international economic integration [13] and broader global engagement. Additionally, these studies highlight innovative perspectives in Vietnam's Doi Moi-era foreign policy [16-17], particularly emphasizing the transformation of Vietnam's foreign policy mindset [19]. The conceptualization of "partners" and "objects" in Vietnam's new foreign policy has also been thoroughly examined [22].

While these studies provide valuable insights, they primarily focus on individual phases of Vietnam's foreign policy transformation rather than a holistic analysis of its continuous and comprehensive nature from 1986 to 2025, as this paper aims to do. Nonetheless, these works serve as a critical foundation for analyzing the core research questions addressed in this article.

Research Methodology

The methodologies of dialectical and historical materialism are applied to analyze Vietnam's foreign policy reform process (1986–2025) within its specific historical context: transitioning from a period of isolation and embargo (1975–1986) to international integration (1986–present) and progressing toward the current *"era of the nation's rise."* Building on this framework, the historical-logical methodology examines the developmental stages of Vietnam's foreign policy. This approach elucidates the inherent logic of its foreign policy trajectory, evolving from principles of independence and self-reliance to multilateralization and diversification, and ultimately to deep international integration and enhanced global standing.

Research methodologies serve as essential tools for collecting, analyzing, and evaluating data to address the scientific objectives outlined by the study. The document analysis method is employed to gather and examine official documents, reports, resolutions, Party directives, and academic sources to elucidate Vietnam's foreign policy renovation process. The historical method is utilized to analyze the historical progression of Vietnam's foreign policy and diplomatic activities from 1986 to 2025, thereby assessing the evolution of foreign policy thinking across distinct phases, from *"breaking the encirclement"* to *"integration"* and *"national ascendance."* Concurrently, the qualitative analysis method is applied to examine the content of speeches, Party documents, and policy materials to clarify key foreign policy principles, such as independence, self-reliance, multilateralization, and diversification.

Finally, the forecasting method predicts trends in Vietnam's foreign policy beyond 2025, drawing on historical data and the international context.

Results and Discussions

Foundations of Vietnam's Doi Moi Foreign Policy

Following the complete liberation of South Vietnam in 1975, Vietnam achieved national reunification with the establishment of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in 1976. During the initial phase (1976–1978), Vietnam's diplomacy secured substantial material and moral support from the socialist bloc and progressive organizations and movements to facilitate post-war national recovery and reconstruction. Concurrently, Vietnam proactively expanded its international relations, progressively establishing diplomatic ties with all Southeast Asian countries, Oceania, Northwestern Europe, and numerous other nations with diverse political and social systems. Vietnam also negotiated with the United States to normalize bilateral relations [18]. In 1977, Vietnam became an official member of the United Nations (September 20, 1977) and joined several other international organizations. Regionally, Vietnam's four-point policy, announced on July 5, 1976, fostered positive developments in relations with ASEAN [15], paving the way for regional integration. These diplomatic achievements during this period underscore Vietnam's distinct pursuit of an *"independent and self-reliant"* foreign policy in the immediate post-liberation era.

In early 1979, Vietnam's involvement in two border conflicts, the Southwestern border war, which aided Cambodia in overthrowing the Khmer Rouge genocidal regime, and the Northern border war, created new challenges on the international stage. These challenges centered around the *"Cambodia problem,"* which led to the formation of a united front by Western and ASEAN nations. This coalition aimed to isolate Vietnam through economic, political, and diplomatic embargoes. These actions severely hindered Vietnam's socio-economic development during this period. Although Vietnam received significant material and moral support from the Soviet Union and other socialist bloc countries, the persistent containment and opposition from Western nations, led by the United States and including some ASEAN members, resulted in Vietnam's international isolation and hampered its regional and global integration [20].

In the early 1980s, Vietnam faced formidable challenges. Domestically, the nation grappled with a severe and protracted socio-economic crisis. Internationally, it encountered political isolation and an economic embargo [17]. Meanwhile, the rapid scientific and technological revolution and the rise of regionalization and globalization presented opportunities and challenges for many nations, including Vietnam. In this

context, the urgent need for 'Đổi mới' (Renovation) and an open-door policy became paramount. The primary objective was to integrate with the region and the world, thereby 'combining national strength with the power of the times' to overcome immediate difficulties and pave the way for a new era of development and global integration. This shift was deemed critical for Vietnam's survival and future prosperity.

The Evolution of Vietnam's Foreign Policy (1986-2025)

After prolonged exploration, experimentation, struggle, and practical evaluation, the Communist Party of Vietnam officially launched the comprehensive Đổi Mới (Renovation) policy at its 6th National Congress in December 1986. This event marked a fundamental and decisive turning point in Vietnam's socialist construction. The Congress established a comprehensive national renovation framework, encompassing thinking, organization, personnel, and leadership reforms within the Party and the economy, political system, and other aspects of social life. It unequivocally affirmed that renovation was an urgent necessity and a matter of vital importance for Vietnam's revolutionary cause. Alongside this domestic renovation, Vietnam's foreign policy underwent a significant transformation, reflected in shifts in both foreign policy thinking and activities. The renewal of foreign policy thinking provided the foundation for subsequent changes in foreign policy strategies, policies, and actions.

The renovation of Vietnam's foreign policy thinking in the formulation of its foreign policy represents a transformation in worldview, assessment of international and regional dynamics, the redefinition of *"friend-foe"* distinctions, and the renewal of approaches to designing and implementing foreign policy to safeguard and promote "national and ethnic interests effectively." The process of renovating Vietnam's foreign policy thinking has been closely intertwined with the transformation of foreign policy activities, grounded in a thorough understanding and adept management of the critical interplay between *"renovation," "development,"* and *"integration."* This process of renewal of foreign policy, developed by the Party and the State, has progressed through steady and deliberate steps, consistently tested in practice, thereby drawing valuable lessons through a process of inheritance, supplementation, and continuation, aligned with the country's capabilities and the external context [14]. Broadly, this process is evident through distinct phases: breaking the encirclement and embargo (1986–1995); expanding relations and pursuing international economic integration with the region and the world (1995–2010); deepening relationships and achieving

comprehensive international integration (2011–2025); and moving toward an era of national ascent for the benefit of the nation.

Period 1986-1995

From 1986 through 1995, the Communist Party of Vietnam underwent a significant shift in understanding of the world, regional dynamics, and emerging trends in international relations. It included re-evaluating the roles and positions of major powers within the global order. Based on this new perspective, the Party's 6th National Congress (December 1986) established a foreign policy motto: *"Combining national strength with the power of the times."* It aimed to create a collaboration for the nation's renovation process, grounded in the principles of *"expanding relations with international organizations... and with all countries on the principle of peaceful coexistence"* [7, p.561]. However, the formal and active renovation of Vietnam's foreign policy thinking, guidelines, and activities officially began in 1988.

On May 20, 1988, the Politburo issued Resolution No. 13, titled *"On the Tasks and Foreign Policy in the New Situation,"* which clearly outlined two major shifts. The first was a change in the primary foreign policy objective, moving from a focus on *"security"* to a new emphasis on *"development,"* with a specific focus on *"economic development."* The second was a fundamental change in the *"friend-foe"* mentality, encapsulated in the new foreign policy motto: *"Befriend more, alienate fewer"* [16]. Therefore, this resolution is the foundational basis for Vietnam's Renovation-era foreign policy.

The principle of *"making more friends, reducing enemies"* was deemed consistent with Vietnam's new approach to rallying forces in the post-Cold War era, an approach clearly anticipated during preparations for the 6th Party Congress. On this basis, Vietnam successfully collaborated with ASEAN countries and the United Nations to resolve the *"Cambodia Issue,"* thereby de-escalating conflict and paving the way for the normalization of relations with China (1991) and the United States (1995). Notably, the normalization of diplomatic relations with the United States enabled Vietnam to break the encirclement and embargo imposed by major powers since 1979, opening the path for Vietnam's regional integration in line with the policy of *"international economic integration"* [20].

Notably, building on the principle of *"making more friends, reducing enemies"* outlined in Resolution 13-BCT (1988), at the 7th Party Congress (June 1991), Vietnam affirmed its aspiration to *"be a friend to all countries in the global community, striving for peace, independence, and development."* It laid the foundation for Vietnam to expand its foreign relations further with countries and international organizations beyond the

socialist system. In practice, Resolution 13-BCT and the stance of the 7th Party Congress marked a significant shift in Vietnam's foreign policy thinking and objectives. It also provided the groundwork for the "diversification and multilateralization" policy established at the National Conference of Delegates mid-term during the 7th Party Congress (January 1994), aligned with an independent, autonomous, open, and multilateralized foreign policy approach. The *"diversification and multilateralization"* principle of international relations set the stage for formulating a broader *"diversifying international relations"* policy on regional and global scales, ushering in a new phase in Vietnam's diplomatic activities. Vietnam's process of international economic integration commenced with the signing of the Framework Cooperation Agreement (FCA) on July 17, 1995, and its official accession to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) on July 28, 1995 [25].

Period 1996-2010

Building on the achievements of the 7th Party Congress under the spirit of *"Vietnam's desire to be a friend to all countries in the international community,"* the 8th National Party Congress (June 1996) reaffirmed: Vietnam will continue to pursue an independent, autonomous, open, multi-lateralized, and diversified foreign policy, guided by the principle of being a friend to all nations in the global community, striving for peace, independence, and development. Vietnam will engage in multifaceted cooperation, both bilaterally and multilaterally, with countries, international organizations, and regional entities, based on the principles of mutual respect for independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, non-interference in internal affairs, equality, and mutual benefit, while resolving outstanding issues and disputes through negotiation [6, p.120-121].

The 8th National Party Congress continued to promote the policy of advancing international economic integration, furthering regional integration through participation in the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA), while simultaneously pursuing membership in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum and preparing for global integration by initiating the process of accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO). The Congress emphasized enhancing multilateral foreign policy activities, focusing on expanding Party-to-Party and people-to-people diplomacy with state diplomacy, guided by the principle of *"multi-lateralization and diversification"*. This approach aimed to garner widespread support from the peoples of the international community, serving the cause of national industrialization and modernization. Vietnam's accession to APEC (1998) and the signing of the Vietnam-U.S. Bilateral

Trade Agreement (2000) marked significant milestones, paving the way for Vietnam's deeper development and integration on the global stage.

The 9th National Party Congress (April 2001) marked a significant milestone in renovating the Communist Party of Vietnam's foreign policy thinking. Specifically, building on Vietnam's evolving position and capabilities, the Party shifted its foreign policy approach from *"desiring to be a friend"* (as articulated at the 7th Party Congress) to *"being ready to be a friend"* and a *"reliable partner to countries in the international community"* [8, p119-120]. This shift toward a policy of "developing strategic partnerships" and deepening existing international relationships represented a critical evolution in the conceptualization of *"friend-foe"* dynamics, moving toward notions of *"friends"* and *"partners."* To facilitate this transformation, the Communist Party of Vietnam officially abandoned the traditional *"friend"* and *"foe"* framework, adopting the terms *"partner"* and *"counterpart"* in its place [22].

Resolution No. 8 of the 9th Central Committee clearly articulated: *"Those who advocate respect for Vietnam's independence and sovereignty, and seek to establish and expand friendly, equal, and mutually beneficial cooperation with Vietnam, are our partners. Any forces with intentions or actions to undermine Vietnam's objectives in the cause of national construction and defense are subjects of struggle. Within each subject, there may be aspects that can be leveraged, and among certain partners, there may exist differences or conflicts with our interests"* [1, p.44]. Thus, Resolution No. 8 of the 9th Central Committee encapsulated the core tenets of the Party's foreign policy thinking in the new context. In addition, the Communist Party of Vietnam issued Resolution No. 07-NQ/TW on November 27, 2001, concerning international economic integration, intending to capitalize on favorable global conditions to advance Vietnam's development and integration objectives. On November 7, 2006, Vietnam was officially admitted to the World Trade Organization (WTO), marking a significant milestone in the success of Vietnam's international economic integration process [13].

By early 2006, Vietnam had achieved significant milestones in its process of international economic integration, establishing and expanding relations with numerous countries and major international organizations worldwide. On this basis, the 10th National Party Congress (April 2006) clearly affirmed: *"Vietnam is a friend and reliable partner to countries in the international community,"* while setting the objective of *"deepening, stabilizing, and sustaining established international relationships"* [9, p.112]. Thus, building on the perspective of the 9th Party Congress, the 10th Party Congress elevated the concept of *"partnership relations"* to a higher, more profound, qualitative, and comprehensive level.

Vietnam explicitly defined strategic partnerships as being established based on mutual relations grounded in the need to enhance cooperation, with greater emphasis on each other's strategic interests, a desire to promote extensive and mutually beneficial collaboration, and an aim to build strategic trust [12]. Following its official accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO), Vietnam continued to *"proactively and actively pursue international economic integration"* and *"engage more deeply and comprehensively with global, regional, and bilateral economic institutions"* [9, p.114]. The 10th Party Congress (2006) was the first to affirm a policy of international cooperation across all domains, stating: *"actively pursue international economic integration while simultaneously expanding international cooperation in all other fields"* [9, p. 114]. Overall, the 10th Party Congress is regarded as a milestone that reviewed 20 years of Đổi Mới, highlighting significant achievements in foreign policy, including successful international economic integration, the development of strategic partnerships with numerous countries, and the establishment of a positive image and enhanced standing in the eyes of the international community. The subsequent phase also marked a turning point for further innovation in the Party and State's foreign policy thinking, strategies, and activities.

Period 2011-2025

Entering the second decade of the 21st century, cooperation and development remained the dominant trends of the era, yet the world continued to face numerous challenges stemming from intensifying great power competition, a global economic crisis, and an incomplete recovery. Alongside these, the rapid advancement of science and technology, notably the Fourth Industrial Revolution, has generated new momentum for creative growth and digital transformation [27]. In this context, after more than two decades of implementing the Đổi Mới reforms, Vietnam's national strength and capabilities have been significantly enhanced. Vietnam's geopolitical and geostrategic stature has grown in the perception of major powers and has positively influenced the international community's views. These developments have laid a crucial foundation for significant shifts in Vietnam's foreign policy thinking, strategies, and activities, grounded in the continued pursuit of an independent, autonomous, peaceful, friendly, cooperative, and development-oriented foreign policy, characterized by multilateralization, diversification, and proactive and active international integration [21].

At the 11th National Party Congress (January 2011), the Communist Party of Vietnam introduced significant changes in the conceptualization and implementation of foreign policy. For the first time, national and ethnic interests were designated as

the paramount objective of all foreign policy activities. In terms of the conceptual framework, the Communist Party of Vietnam clearly affirmed that the category of national and ethnic interests encompasses an interwoven combination of class interests, national interests, and ethnic interests. By the 12th National Party Congress (January 2016), the Communist Party of Vietnam further specified that the objective of Vietnam's foreign policy activities must be to *"safeguard the supreme interests of the nation and its people, based on the fundamental principles of international law, equality, and mutual benefit"* [11, p.153].

The 11th National Party Congress also clearly demonstrated a shift in Vietnam's foreign policy approach, moving from the stance of *"Vietnam as a friend and reliable partner to countries, striving for peace, stability, and development"* to *"Vietnam as a friend, reliable partner, and active, responsible member of the international community."* This shift underscored Vietnam's enhanced position and stature on the global stage. Based on this understanding, coupled with the achievements attained through the process of international economic integration, Vietnam adopted the policy of *"proactive and active international integration"* [10, p.187], thereby expanding its integration process to be *"deeper and more comprehensive"*. This policy became a major strategic orientation for the cause of building and defending Vietnam in the new era. The Communist Party of Vietnam's understanding of the relationship between independence, autonomy, and international integration has grown increasingly profound, emphasizing the combination of national strength with the era's power, with internal resources as decisive and external resources as significant [3].

The 11th National Party Congress continued to emphasize the objectives of security, development, and influence, while placing greater priority on the goal of *"influence"* to expand Vietnam's reach, enhance its stature, and foster a positive image in the eyes of the international community, in alignment with its deeper international integration at both bilateral and multilateral levels. In implementation, Vietnam proactively participated in international forums as a responsible member, while gradually *"striving to assume a leading, guiding, or mediating role in multilateral forums and organizations of strategic importance"* [2].

Promoting multilateral diplomacy in tandem with deeper international integration presents numerous challenges. Therefore, the implementation of foreign policy activities must steadfastly adhere to strategic principles and objectives while employing flexible and astute tactics, underpinned by close and effective coordination among Party diplomacy, state diplomacy, and people-to-people diplomacy under the unified leadership of the Party and the centralized management of the State. The Communist Party of Vietnam regards these as the foundational pillars for building a

comprehensive diplomatic framework. The foreign policy innovations introduced at the 11th National Party Congress (2011), which focused on deepening Vietnam's international relationships, achieving comprehensive international integration, and advancing multilateral diplomacy, have been further refined and enriched at the 12th (2016) and 13th (2021) National Party Congresses.

Era of the nation's rise: A New Vision for Vietnam's Foreign Policy

From 1986 to 2005, Vietnam's foreign policy consistently maintained flexibility and comprehensiveness, enabling the country to break through isolation and embargoes, create a foundation for development, and elevate its national stature. From a state of diplomatic isolation and economic sanctions, by 2025, Vietnam had established diplomatic relations with 194 countries and had become a member of over 70 regional and global forums and organizations. Vietnam has established comprehensive and strategic partnerships with 35 countries, including all ASEAN member states and key ASEAN partners. It can be affirmed that cooperation with ASEAN members and the network of ASEAN partners has significantly contributed to ensuring a peaceful, stable, and favorable environment for Vietnam's development and growing prosperity. This cooperation has opened a promising space for Vietnam's development while enhancing its international prestige, role, and standing [5].

The network of free trade agreements (FTAs) that Vietnam has signed and implemented with more than 60 countries and economies has significantly contributed to its emergence as one of the world's top 40 economies and among the top 20 globally in attracting foreign investment and trade volume. Transitioning from a closed economy with chronic foreign currency shortages, Vietnam has risen to become one of the fastest-growing economies in the world. In 2024, Vietnam's total import-export turnover surpassed 780 billion USD, with major partners including the United States, China, the European Union (EU), South Korea, and Japan. Foreign direct investment (FDI) has also grown remarkably [23]. Vietnam has become an attractive destination for investors, owing to its stable political environment, abundant labor force, and favorable investment policies.

Building on its robust pursuit of multilateral diplomacy, Vietnam is currently a member of nearly all major international organizations and multilateral forums. The country has successfully hosted numerous significant international conferences and fulfilled key international responsibilities, including serving as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (2008–2009 and 2020–2021), hosting ASEAN Summits (1998, 2010, and 2020), the ASEM Summit (2004), APEC Summits (2006 and 2017), the World Economic Forum on ASEAN (2018), and the U.S.-North

Korea Summit (2019). Additionally, Vietnam has deployed hundreds of personnel to participate in United Nations peacekeeping operations, among other contributions.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, Vietnam's foreign policy retained its strategic prominence, which was characterized by proactive engagement by sharing expertise and resources and enhanced cooperation with regional and global partners. In the post-COVID-19 era, Vietnam's foreign policy has facilitated economic recovery and sustainable development. Through strategic cultural diplomacy and robust international communication, Vietnam has cultivated a global image as a modern, peaceful, and cooperative nation, earning widespread recognition. The significant inflow of investments from South Korea and Japan reflects economic imperatives and deep cultural affinities, strengthening people-to-people connections. Furthermore, the overseas Vietnamese diaspora has emerged as a critical conduit for public diplomacy, serving as informal ambassadors to foster linkages between Vietnam and the international community.

Since 1986, Vietnam’s foreign policy has evolved significantly, fostering an open and conducive environment for national protection and development. Transitioning from a focus on economic integration, Vietnam has embraced comprehensive and multifaceted international engagement. The country has assumed a proactive and pivotal role in key regional and global mechanisms, aligning with its strategic interests while making meaningful and responsible contributions to addressing pressing global challenges.

Throughout the nation's development since the Đổi Mới (Renovation) period, foreign policy has closely coordinated with other sectors under the direct, absolute, and comprehensive leadership of the Communist Party and the unified management of the State. By leveraging the combined strength of the entire nation and the political system, it has accomplished the following key tasks [24]:

1) Promoting a pioneering role in maintaining a peaceful and stable environment, firmly protecting national sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national interests, and safeguarding the Party and the socialist regime.
2) Proactively and actively advancing comprehensive and deep international integration.
3) Mobilizing significant external resources to serve socio-economic development, and to accelerate national industrialization and modernization.
4) Enhancing Vietnam's position and prestige on the world stage.

As a result, it can be said that *"our country has never before had the fortune, potential, position, and international prestige as it does today"* [4], a success to which foreign policy has made crucial contributions.

The 13th National Party Congress (January 2021) clearly outlined the primary orientation of Vietnam's foreign policy through 2030, emphasizing the prioritization of national and ethnic interests in all foreign policy activities, proactive and active comprehensive and deep international integration, and the continued pioneering role of foreign policy. Emphasis was placed on multilateral diplomacy to establish and maintain a peaceful, stable, and development-oriented environment, while adhering to the principle of *"combining national strength with the power of the era."* This approach aims to actively mobilize external resources, particularly technology, to support development and enhance the country's stature and prestige. To further strengthen diplomatic activities, Vietnam has adopted the policy of *"building a comprehensive and modern diplomatic framework with three pillars: Party diplomacy, state diplomacy, and people-to-people diplomacy."* It reflects a new, strategic, long-term, and urgent requirement for foreign policy and the diplomatic corps in the nation's new development phase.

By 2030, as a new international order emerges, the global landscape is expected to undergo profound transformations, driven by intensifying strategic competition among major powers, notably the United States and China. While heightened risks of armed conflicts, arms races, and military build-ups are anticipated, peace, cooperation, and sustainable development will likely remain prevailing global trends. The Asia-Pacific region, particularly Southeast Asia, will continue solidifying its position as a dynamic hub of global economic growth and geopolitical significance.

Against this backdrop, 2026 to 2030 represents a critical window of strategic opportunity, a pivotal phase for Vietnam to achieve its centennial strategic objectives. For Vietnam, the era of national ascent is one of breakthrough development and accelerated progress under the leadership of the Communist Party of Vietnam, aimed at successfully building a socialist, prosperous, democratic, equitable, civilized, and thriving Vietnam that catches up, advances alongside, and stands shoulder-to-shoulder with the world's leading powers. The foremost priority in this new era is to successfully realize the strategic goals set for 2030, positioning Vietnam as a developing nation with a modern industrial base and upper-middle-income status, and by 2045, as a developed socialist country with high income, where all citizens enjoy comprehensive development and a prosperous, free, happy, and civilized life [26].

In this period of national advancement, Vietnam seeks to bolster its comprehensive national power, consolidate and deepen established international

partnerships, and enhance its global standing. Consequently, Vietnam's foreign policy is poised to capitalize on opportunities to foster constructive relations with key partners, notably neighboring states and major powers. This strategic approach safeguards domestic peace and stability, even in challenging regional and global dynamics.

Conclusions

Over nearly four decades from 1986 to 2025, Vietnam's foreign policy has undergone a remarkable transformation, evolving from breaking through isolation and embargoes to achieve international economic integration and ultimately establishing itself as a reliable partner and an active, responsible member of the international community. The Đổi Mới reforms, initiated at the 6th Party Congress (1986), laid the foundation for expanding diplomatic relations, multi-lateralizing and diversifying international ties, and promoting comprehensive and deep integration. Significant achievements, such as accession to ASEAN and the WTO, signing numerous free trade agreements, assuming prominent roles in multilateral forums like the United Nations and APEC, and contributing to international peacekeeping, have underscored the maturity of Vietnamese diplomacy. Notably, amid global challenges such as the Covid-19 pandemic, Vietnam's foreign policy demonstrated flexibility and creativity, enhancing the country's prestige and stature while mobilizing resources to support socio-economic development and national modernization.

Looking to the future, with the solid foundations already established, Vietnam's diplomacy is expected to continue its pioneering role in safeguarding national and ethnic interests while actively contributing to addressing global challenges. In an increasingly complex world marked by great power competition, climate change, and the Fifth Industrial Revolution, Vietnam must remain steadfast in its principles of independence and autonomy while adopting flexible tactics to capitalize on emerging trends such as digital transformation and the green economy. Strengthening a comprehensive and modern diplomatic framework, underpinned by the three pillars of Party diplomacy, state diplomacy, and people-to-people diplomacy, will be key to maintaining and elevating Vietnam's global stature. It will pave the way for a more robust era of national ascent, affirming Vietnam's role as a responsible, peaceful, and development-oriented nation on the international stage.

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