

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS: FROM INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORIES TO VIETNAM'S PRACTICE

ĐỐI TÁC CHIẾN LƯỢC: TỪ CÁC TRƯỜNG PHÁI LÝ THUYẾT QUAN HỆ QUỐC TẾ ĐẾN THỰC TIỄN CỦA VIỆT NAM

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Abstract - Strategic partnerships are one of the most common forms of cooperation in international relations, reflecting the trend toward stronger linkages among states to secure their interests and adapt to changes in the international environment. This concept remains conceptually ambiguous and is approached differently in both academic research and foreign policy practice. The article clarifies the formation and development of the term “strategic partnership”, and analyzes the approaches of various schools of international relations theory, including realism, liberalism, and constructivism. The article also examines the practical implementation of strategic partnerships by Vietnam during the Doi Moi Renovation period. The research affirms that strategic partnerships contribute to enhancing Vietnam's national standing and expanding its scope of cooperation in the context of international integration.

Key words - Strategic partnership; international relations; international relations theory; Vietnam's foreign policy; international integration.

1. Introduction

In the context of profound shifts in the international order after the Cold War, particularly under the impact of globalization, strategic competition among major powers, and the rise of both traditional and non-traditional security challenges, states have increasingly prioritized the construction of flexible cooperation frameworks to secure national interests and enhance their capacity to adapt to a changing international environment. Among these frameworks, strategic partnerships have become one of the most widely used forms of cooperation in contemporary international relations. Established not only between states, this framework has also been expanded to relations between states and intergovernmental organizations such as the European Union (EU), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the African Union (AU), reflecting the trend toward diversifying forms of cooperation in global governance.

Although widely used in diplomatic practice, the concept of “strategic partnership” remains one of the contested terms in international relations studies. Unlike relatively well-defined concepts such as “alliance”, “special relationship”, or “comprehensive cooperation”, the connotation of strategic partnership remains rather

Tóm tắt - Quan hệ đối tác chiến lược là một trong những hình thức hợp tác phổ biến trong quan hệ quốc tế, phản ánh xu hướng tăng cường liên kết giữa các quốc gia nhằm bảo đảm lợi ích và thích ứng với những biến động của môi trường quốc tế. Đây vẫn là một khái niệm có nội hàm chưa thống nhất và được tiếp cận khác nhau trong cả nghiên cứu học thuật lẫn thực tiễn chính sách đối ngoại. Bài viết làm rõ quá trình hình thành và phát triển của thuật ngữ “đối tác chiến lược”, phân tích cách tiếp cận của các trường phái lý thuyết quan hệ quốc tế, bao gồm chủ nghĩa hiện thực, chủ nghĩa tự do và chủ nghĩa kiến tạo. Bài viết cũng tiếp cận thực tiễn triển khai quan hệ đối tác chiến lược của Việt Nam trong thời kỳ Đổi mới. Nghiên cứu khẳng định rằng quan hệ đối tác chiến lược góp phần nâng cao vị thế quốc gia và mở rộng không gian hợp tác của Việt Nam trong bối cảnh hội nhập quốc tế.

Từ khóa - Đối tác chiến lược; quan hệ quốc tế; lý thuyết quan hệ quốc tế; chính sách đối ngoại Việt Nam; hội nhập quốc tế.

flexible, depending on the historical context, national interests, and policy objectives of each actor. Existing studies have mainly approached the issue in three directions. First, some works focus on clarifying the origins, characteristics, and connotation of the concept of strategic partnership as a form of cooperation in international relations. Second, many studies analyze specific cases, such as strategic partnerships between the EU and major powers, between Russia and China, or between the United States and its allies and important partners. Third, a number of studies on Vietnam's foreign policy mainly describe the process of establishing and expanding its network of strategic partnerships since Doi Moi. However, most existing studies still examine the theoretical and practical dimensions separately, while there remains a lack of research that applies schools of international relations theory as a unified analytical framework to explain the motivations, characteristics, and significance of Vietnam's construction of its strategic partnership network.

This research gap has become increasingly noteworthy in the context of Vietnam's foreign policy entering a new stage of development. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, Vietnam has continuously established and

upgraded partnership relations with many countries and international organizations, forming an extensive network of partners that covers most major power centers and important partners of the world economy. However, the rapid expansion of this network raises a number of issues that require explanation, such as why Vietnam has chosen the strategic partnership model instead of alliances; what factors have driven the process of expanding and upgrading partnership frameworks; how schools of international relations theory can explain this phenomenon; and how the strategic partnership policy has contributed to implementing Vietnam’s foreign policy line of independence, self-reliance, multilateralization, diversification, and expansion of its strategic space.

Based on the issues above, this article focuses on answering two main research questions. First, how do realism, liberalism, and constructivism explain the formation and development of strategic partnerships? Second, how can these theoretical approaches be applied to analyze the process of building and developing Vietnam’s strategic partnership network during the Doi Moi period?

To answer these questions, the article uses three major schools of international relations theory - realism, liberalism, and constructivism - as a cross-cutting analytical framework to explain security motivations, development interests, and identity factors in Vietnam’s strategic partnership policy. On this basis, the article not only analyzes the formation and expansion of Vietnam’s strategic partnership network but also assesses the achievements, limitations, and significance of this policy for enhancing Vietnam’s international standing and expanding its strategic space in the context of intensifying strategic competition among major powers.

Academically, the study contributes in three respects. First, it systematizes and clarifies the connotation of the concept of strategic partnership relations on the basis of synthesizing theoretical approaches and international practice. Second, it develops an analytical framework that combines three schools of international relations theory to explain the phenomenon of strategic partnerships, rather than merely introducing each school separately. Third, it applies this analytical framework to explain the case of Vietnam, thereby contributing to supplementing the theoretical basis for research on Vietnam’s foreign policy in a rapidly changing international context.

To clarify the theoretical and practical foundations of strategic partnerships in Vietnam’s foreign policy, the article adopts a qualitative approach combined with several research methods appropriate to the characteristics of the field of international relations.

First, the document analysis method is used to systematize theoretical perspectives on strategic partnerships from studies by domestic and foreign scholars, as well as official documents of states and international organizations. Data sources include monographs, scholarly articles, research reports, documents of the Communist Party of Vietnam, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam, joint statements, declarations on the establishment of strategic partnerships,

and official documents of the United Nations, ASEAN, and the EU.

Second, the historical method is employed to examine the formation and development of the concept of “strategic partnership relations” in the context of transformations in the international system after the Cold War, while also clarifying the development of Vietnam’s strategic partnership network from the beginning of the Doi Moi period to 2026.

Third, the article uses the case study method with regard to Vietnam to analyze the motivations, characteristics, and significance of the strategic partnership policy in implementing the foreign policy line of independence, self-reliance, multilateralization, and diversification of international relations. Vietnam is selected as the case because it is one of the countries with a rapidly expanding strategic partnership network in the region, while at the same time maintaining a policy of non-military alliance, thereby constituting a valuable case study for both the theory and practice of international relations.

Finally, the article employs comparative theoretical analysis to compare the approaches of the three major schools of international relations - realism, liberalism, and constructivism - to strategic partnerships. On this basis, the study constructs a unified analytical framework to explain the case of Vietnam, rather than merely presenting each theoretical school separately.

Table 1. *Analytical framework of the three motivations of Vietnam’s strategic partnerships*

Component	Theory	Analytical Question
Security logic	Realism	What security challenges does Vietnam seek to address?
Development logic	Liberalism	What economic and institutional benefits does Vietnam expect?
Identity logic	Constructivism	How do strategic partnerships reflect Vietnam’s foreign policy thinking and national identity?

2. Research findings

2.1. The term “strategic partnership”

The term “strategic partnership relations” is a multidimensional concept widely used in both the study and practice of international relations, yet its connotation has not reached consensus. This difference stems not only from the characteristics of each political context but is also influenced by language, culture, and the approaches of actors in international relations. In common languages, the term is expressed respectively as Strategic Partnership in English, Partenariat Stratégique in French, Strategische Partnerschaft in German, Asociación Estratégica in Spanish, and Стратегическое партнерство in Russian. Structurally, the concept is formed from two basic components: “partnership” and “strategic”, each of which carries its own connotation and only when combined creates the full meaning of the term [1, p. 4].

The concept of partnership emphasizes cooperative

relations between two or more actors pursuing common objectives on the basis of shared interests and responsibilities. According to Egan, partnership relations are not merely a matter of coordinating actions but also include the establishment of mechanisms to resolve disagreements, promote cooperation, and evaluate outcomes in order to ensure the sustainability of the relationship [2, p. 3]. Meanwhile, the strategic component is understood in various ways. Godement argues that in international relations, “strategic” does not necessarily mean a complete common strategy, but often reflects a sufficient degree of consensus to limit major disagreements among actors [3, p. 63]. From another perspective, the term is also associated with the status, role, or importance of a partner in the power structure of the international system [4].

From the combination of these two components, strategic partnerships are often confused with concepts such as union or alliance, as all aim at coordination among actors to protect or promote national interests [5, pp. 358–383]. However, unlike military alliances, strategic partnerships do not create obligations of collective defense or commitments to use military force to protect a partner against a common threat [6]. Instead, they constitute flexible cooperation frameworks in which cooperation in politics, economics, defense, security, and other fields is carried out on the basis of common interests, while still ensuring each party’s independence in policymaking [7, p. 87]. According to Nguyen Canh Hue, strategic partnership relations are relationships with a high degree of cohesion, long-term orientation, and important significance for both sides, although the level of binding commitment is not the same as that of an alliance [8, p. 14].

In practice, the term strategic partnership originated in the field of management before being widely applied in foreign policy and international relations. Since the end of the Cold War, along with changes in the international balance of power, many states have gradually shifted from rigid alliance models to more flexible cooperation frameworks, making strategic partnerships a prominent trend in modern diplomacy [9, p. 302]. The term was used in contacts between the Soviet Union and the United States at the end of the Cold War, then continued to be maintained in Russia–U.S. relations in the early 1990s and gradually expanded to many regions and different levels of relations [5, p. 367].

Because it emerged more from practice than from a unified theoretical framework, scholars have offered different approaches to the connotation of strategic partnerships. Kay argues that this is a close relationship between two states aimed at pursuing common interests, even when competing interests still exist between them [10, p. 15]. Jain emphasizes that strategic partnerships reflect a higher level of cohesion than ordinary bilateral relations [11, p. 5], while Ness views them as a form of “cooperation in competition”, enabling actors to expand cooperation while maintaining the capacity for strategic competition [12, p. 3]. According to Wilkins, strategic partnership relations are structured cooperation between states or international actors aimed at taking advantage of

development opportunities, sharing resources and risks, and responding more effectively to security and economic challenges than would be possible through unilateral action [5, p. 363]. On that basis, Gajauskaitė argues that strategic partnerships are defined by common strategic objectives and a long-term process of cooperation to realize those objectives [4, p. 191].

In addition to defining the concept, many studies focus on clarifying the constitutive characteristics of strategic partnerships. Nguyen Vu Tung and Hoang Anh Tuan indicate that strategic partnerships may exist in various forms, ranging from substantive cooperative relations to symbolic frameworks or arrangements that play an intermediary role between ordinary relations and alliances [13, p. 11]. Meanwhile, Nandkarni and Zhovkva both emphasize core elements such as the institutionalization of relations, regular dialogue mechanisms, the degree of similarity in strategic interests, coordination on regional and international issues, and the ability to expand cooperation across multiple fields [14, p. 24]. These characteristics show that strategic partnerships are not merely diplomatic labels but also reflect the level of political commitment, trust, and long-term coordination capacity among actors.

From the synthesis of the above approaches, it can be seen that there is no single definition of strategic partnership relations that can be applied to all cases. The connotation of the concept always depends on the historical context, policy objectives, and interests of each actor. Therefore, in this study, strategic partnership relations are understood as an institutionalized cooperation framework between two or more actors in international relations, including states and intergovernmental organizations, established on the basis of similar or complementary strategic interests in order to pursue long-term objectives in politics, security, economics, and other fields, but without creating collective defense obligations as in military alliances. This approach both reflects the common characteristics identified in previous studies and provides a unified basis for analyzing the case of Vietnam in the following sections [15, p. 9].

2.2. Strategic partnerships through the lens of schools of international relations theory

The formation and development of strategic partnerships are not only the result of practical calculations in foreign policy but also reflect how states perceive cooperation in the international environment. In international relations studies, major theoretical schools such as realism, liberalism, and constructivism all seek to explain the causes, conditions, and motivations that promote cooperation among actors. Although they have different foundational assumptions about the nature of the international system, the role of the state, and the possibility of cooperation, all three schools provide important approaches for explaining the formation of strategic partnerships.

From a theoretical perspective, international cooperation is always associated with the strategic choices of actors

under conditions of an anarchic international system. Models in game theory, such as the Prisoner's Dilemma, Stag Hunt, and Chicken Game, show that states may choose cooperation when long-term benefits outweigh the short-term benefits of competition or confrontation. Although there is no common world government capable of enforcing compliance, states still accept certain constraints in order to achieve common benefits through cooperation and institution-building [16, p. 8]. In this context, frameworks such as strategic partnerships, alliances, or special relationships become different institutionalized forms of international cooperation, reflecting the levels of commitment and interests pursued by actors.

According to realism and neorealism, the international system is anarchic in nature, in which states are the central actors that always prioritize ensuring survival and maximizing national interests. In an environment lacking a supreme authority, states must rely on their own capabilities or seek cooperation to strengthen security and balance power. Therefore, cooperation is not an end in itself but an instrument serving national interests. From a realist approach, strategic partnerships are established when states perceive that cooperation brings greater benefits than unilateral action, especially in responding to security challenges, balancing the influence of major powers, or maintaining stability in the strategic environment. However, because national interests are always placed first, such cooperative relations are conditional and may change when the balance of power or strategic environment shifts.

Unlike realism, liberalism and neoliberalism argue that international cooperation arises not only from the need to ensure security but also from economic interests, interdependence, and the role of international institutions. According to this approach, the state remains an important actor but is not the only actor; international organizations, transnational corporations, and non-state actors also participate in shaping international relations. Cooperation helps reduce transaction costs, limit uncertainty, build trust, and create conditions for states to achieve long-term benefits together. The development of trade, investment, and international institutions contributes to reducing the possibility of conflict while expanding the space for cooperation among states [17, p. 227]. Nevertheless, some scholars argue that liberalism still does not fully explain the causes of cooperation, especially in cases where states choose to cooperate even when favorable institutional conditions do not exist or when short-term benefits are not yet truly clear [13, pp. 21–22].

From the perspectives of both realism and liberalism, strategic partnerships can be viewed as instruments of foreign policy aimed at realizing national interests through cooperation. While realism emphasizes the logic of security and balance of power, liberalism highlights the logic of development, interdependence, and the role of institutions. The point of convergence between the two schools is that both recognize the flexibility of strategic partnerships as well as the principle of mutual benefit in cooperation. States do not abandon national interests for common interests; rather,

they seek cooperation frameworks that allow them to maximize their own interests while maintaining autonomy in foreign policymaking.

Meanwhile, constructivism offers a different approach by arguing that state interests and behavior are not entirely determined by power structures or material interests, but are also influenced by identity, norms, and processes of social interaction. From this perspective, states tend to cooperate when they share common perceptions of interests, values, or their roles in the international system. Strategic partnerships are therefore not only the result of strategic calculations but also a social structure constructed through interaction and trust-building. As Wendt argues, strategic partnerships are also “what states make of them” through perceptions, norms, and long-term interaction [18, p. 295]. This explains why the same framework of “strategic partnership” may carry very different meanings, levels of cooperation, and contents among different pairs of partners.

Overall, all three schools are capable of explaining the formation and development of strategic partnerships, but each emphasizes a different dimension. Realism regards strategic partnerships as instruments for ensuring security and balancing power; liberalism views them as the result of interdependence, economic interests, and the role of institutions; while constructivism emphasizes the role of identity, norms, and the process of trust-building among actors [13, p. 58]. At the same time, strategic partnerships constitute an official level of relations and are expressed through official statements and agreements announced in the media [19, p. 413]. These similarities and differences show that no single approach can fully explain all cases of strategic partnership.

On that basis, this article proposes using the three theoretical schools as a unified analytical framework for the case of Vietnam. Accordingly, Vietnam's strategic partnership policy is examined through three main groups of motivations: (i) security logic, reflecting the need to ensure independence and sovereignty and expand strategic space; (ii) development logic, expressing the objective of promoting international integration, strengthening economic linkages, and deriving benefits from cooperative institutions; and (iii) identity logic, reflecting the maintenance of an independent, self-reliant, multilateralized, and diversified foreign policy line, as well as the construction of Vietnam's image as a reliable and responsible partner in the international community. These three logics do not exist separately but complement and interact with one another in the process of formulating and implementing Vietnam's strategic partnership policy. This is also the analytical framework used throughout the empirical research section of the article.

2.3. Vietnam's strategic partnership policy through the lens of schools of international relations theory

Entering the Doi Moi period, together with changes in the international environment after the Cold War, Vietnam gradually adjusted its foreign policy thinking in a direction consistent with the trends of peace, cooperation, and international integration. Its foreign policy line has been

consistently defined as independence, self-reliance, peace, cooperation, and development; multilateralization and diversification of external relations; and proactive and active international integration, with the aim of maintaining a peaceful environment, making the best use of external resources for national development, and enhancing Vietnam's standing and prestige in the international arena [20, pp. 34–35]. On that basis, the motto that “Vietnam is ready to be a friend, a reliable partner, and a responsible member of the international community” has become a guiding orientation throughout the implementation of its foreign policy [21]. Through the expansion of cooperative relations with countries and international organizations, Vietnam has gradually moved from a position of encirclement and embargo to proactive integration, establishing an extensive network of partners and effectively mobilizing resources for national development [22]. According to Nguyen Vu Tung, the construction of a strategic partnership network has created for Vietnam a foreign relations structure with increasingly extensive interwoven interests, ranging from the neighborhood and ASEAN to power centers around the world [8, p. 21].

Since 2001, Vietnam has gradually built and implemented strategic partnerships, comprehensive partnerships, and comprehensive strategic partnerships with many countries around the world. As of June 2026, Vietnam had established 15 comprehensive strategic partnerships, about 20 strategic partnerships, and more than 10 comprehensive partnerships, covering most important partners in the region and the world. Notably, this network includes not only states but also extends to the EU as an intergovernmental organization, reflecting the trend toward diversifying actors in Vietnam's foreign policy. The use of frameworks such as “comprehensive partnership”, “strategic partnership”, “comprehensive strategic partnership”, and “special relationship” shows that Vietnam does not apply a uniform model to all partners but chooses the level of relations appropriate to the degree of political trust, strategic interests, and cooperation prospects of each actor. This reflects a flexible and pragmatic approach that remains consistent with the foreign policy line of independence, self-reliance, multilateralization, and diversification of international relations.

The practical implementation of Vietnam's strategic partnership policy also demonstrates the flexibility of this concept. Dinh Cong Tuan once raised the issue that Vietnam's establishment of strategic partnerships with many countries may create a sense of being “widespread”, while the connotation of the concept has not yet been clearly defined [1, p. 14]. However, this is not a phenomenon unique to Vietnam but a common characteristic of contemporary international relations. Many scholars argue that “strategic partnership” is a flexible concept, even “a promise whose connotation has not yet been clearly defined”, allowing states to maintain a level of commitment appropriate to the interests of each stage of development [23, p. 2]. It is precisely the openness of this concept that enables states to adjust the content of

cooperation according to specific contexts without being bound by rigid legal obligations as in military alliances [24]. At the same time, this is also an advantage in implementing a flexible foreign policy in an increasingly “multi-partner” world, rather than one characterized only by competition according to the logic of “multipolarity” [25, p. 289].

From a realist perspective, the development of the strategic partnership network first reflects Vietnam's need to ensure security and expand its strategic space in the context of intensifying competition among major powers. With its important geostrategic position in Southeast Asia and the South China Sea, Vietnam faces both traditional security challenges and direct impacts from strategic competition among major powers. Under these conditions, choosing strategic partnerships instead of military alliances allows Vietnam to strengthen cooperation with various partners while still maintaining the principles of independence, self-reliance, non-military alliance, and not siding with any party in strategic competition among major powers. This policy contributes to minimizing the risk of dependence on a single major power, while creating a flexible balance in relations with international power centers [26, p. 35].

According to the logic of realism, differences in Vietnam's approach to each group of partners also reflect different strategic calculations. Relations with China are both cooperative and marked by competition and disagreements, especially regarding the South China Sea issue; meanwhile, relations with the United States, Japan, Australia, India, and the Philippines are promoted in order to strengthen security and defense cooperation and contribute to maintaining the strategic balance in the region. However, this expansion of cooperation does not mean the formation of military alliances, but mainly aims at building trust, enhancing defense capabilities, and maintaining a peaceful and stable environment for development [27, p. 272]. In particular, the comprehensive strategic partnership with the Russian Federation continues to be maintained on the basis of history, political trust, and traditional defense cooperation, while adapting to changes in the current international environment [28].

At the same time, liberalism helps explain the process of expanding the strategic partnership network from the perspective of development and international integration. For Vietnam, strategic partnerships are not only intended to ensure security but also serve as instruments to promote trade, investment, technology transfer, human resource development, and stronger linkages with regional and global institutions. In the face of regional and global challenges, the establishment of Vietnam's strategic partnership network is regarded by many researchers as a form of “preventive diplomacy” [26, p. 35] in many fields, such as politics and diplomacy, defense and security, economics and trade, and other areas.

From the combined perspective of the three theoretical schools, Vietnam's strategic partnership policy can be seen as the result of the simultaneous combination of security logic, development logic, and identity logic. This policy

not only helps Vietnam maintain a peaceful environment and strengthen its capacity to adapt to strategic competition among major powers, but also creates conditions for expanding international integration, attracting resources for development, and enhancing national standing. In practice, Vietnam is the only ASEAN member state that has strategic or comprehensive partnerships with all G7 countries and with most G20 economies. Along with this, its successful assumption of the role of non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council for the 2020–2021 term, Chair of ASEAN in 2020, member of the United Nations Human Rights Council for the 2023–2025 term, and the election of a Vietnamese representative as a judge of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea for the 2026–2035 term show that Vietnam's international standing continues to be consolidated. These achievements provide a basis for many scholars to regard Vietnam as an emerging middle power in the region [8, p. 21], [29], [30, p. 93], [31, p. 7], [32, p. 3].

However, the effectiveness of the strategic partnership policy also needs to be assessed objectively. Although the partnership network has increasingly expanded, the substantive level of cooperation among partners remains uneven; gaps between political frameworks and concrete cooperation outcomes still exist in some cases. Balancing relations with major powers in the context of increasingly intense strategic competition also places higher demands on the capacity to formulate and implement foreign policy. Tran Thi Thuy Ha points out that in relations with some partners, the content of exchanges still lacks depth, political effectiveness is not commensurate, and limitations remain in terms of proactiveness and the capacity to create breakthroughs in cooperation [22, p. 62]. This shows that establishing a strategic partnership framework is only a necessary condition; the ultimate effectiveness still depends on the ability to translate political commitments into concrete cooperation outcomes in such fields as economics, science and technology, defense, and people-to-people exchanges.

Vietnam's strategic partnership policy reflects a combination of the requirements of ensuring national security, promoting development, and building the image of an independent, self-reliant, and responsible country in the international community. The simultaneous application of realist, liberal, and constructivist approaches shows that Vietnam's strategic partnership network is not only the result of immediate interest calculations but also the manifestation of a long-term foreign policy strategy aimed at expanding strategic space, enhancing international standing, and creating a favorable foundation for national development in the context of a transforming international order.

3. Conclusion

Strategic partnerships are one of the prominent forms of cooperation in post-Cold War international relations, reflecting the shift from confrontational alliance models to flexible, multi-layered cooperation frameworks based on the interweaving of interests among actors. Although no unified definition exists in academic circles, the synthesis of existing

studies and international practice shows that strategic partnerships are characterized by long-term orientation, a certain degree of institutionalization, the convergence or complementarity of strategic interests, and a commitment to expanding cooperation across multiple fields. On this basis, the article has proposed an approach to strategic partnerships as an institutionalized cooperation framework among actors in international relations aimed at pursuing long-term strategic objectives, but without creating collective defense obligations as in military alliances.

From a theoretical perspective, the study shows that no single school of thought can fully explain the formation and development of strategic partnerships. Realism explains strategic partnerships in terms of the need to ensure security, balance power, and maximize national interests; liberalism emphasizes the role of interdependence, international institutions, and the pursuit of common interests; while constructivism clarifies the influence of identity, norms, and the process of trust-building among actors. Rather than viewing these three approaches as independent explanations, the article argues that they are mutually complementary and proposes the use of three analytical logics - security, development, and identity - as a unified theoretical framework for studying Vietnam's strategic partnership policy.

The application of this analytical framework to the case of Vietnam shows that the development of its strategic partnership network is not only the result of renewed foreign policy thinking but also reflects Vietnam's capacity to adapt to changes in the regional and international strategic environment. From a realist perspective, choosing the strategic partnership model instead of military alliances allows Vietnam both to expand cooperation with power centers and to maintain an independent and self-reliant foreign policy line without being bound to confrontational structures among major powers. From a liberal perspective, the strategic partnership network contributes to promoting international integration and expanding trade, investment, and development cooperation through bilateral and multilateral mechanisms. Meanwhile, the constructivist approach shows that the transformation of Vietnam's foreign policy identity - from a once-isolated country into "a friend, a reliable partner, and a responsible member of the international community" - has established the necessary political foundation and trust to expand cooperation frameworks with states and international organizations.

The research findings also show that the strategic partnership policy has made an important contribution to expanding Vietnam's strategic space, increasing the interweaving of interests with key partners, and enhancing Vietnam's standing and role in ASEAN as well as in regional and global mechanisms. However, the study also indicates that the effectiveness of this policy is not entirely even among partners. In some cases, gaps remain between partnership frameworks at the political level and substantive cooperation outcomes; balancing relations with major powers in the context of increasingly intense strategic competition continues to pose challenges to the implementation of Vietnam's foreign policy line of

independence, self-reliance, multilateralization, and diversification of international relations.

Based on these findings, the article argues that in the coming period, the focus of the strategic partnership policy should not only be on continuing to expand the number of partners or upgrading relationship frameworks, but more importantly on improving the quality and substantive effectiveness of each partnership, strengthening the capacity to translate political commitments into concrete cooperation outcomes in the fields of economics, science and technology, defense, security, and people-to-people exchanges. At the same time, Vietnam needs to continue promoting its proactive role in ASEAN and multilateral institutions, effectively utilizing its strategic partnership network to consolidate a peaceful environment, expand development space, and enhance its strategic autonomy in the context of continuing transformations in the regional and international order.

Academically, the study contributes to clarifying the connotation of the concept of strategic partnership, while proposing an integrated analytical framework combining realism, liberalism, and constructivism to explain Vietnam's strategic partnership policy. This approach not only helps connect the theoretical and practical dimensions but can also be applied in further studies on Vietnam's foreign policy or in comparative research on strategic partnership policies among states in the context of intensifying strategic competition among major powers.

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