

## **Concept of People's War**

**JINF:** We are facing a serious challenge in all of the South China Sea, the Indian Ocean and the East China Sea. Could you tell us how you think Japan and Vietnam can form a partnership in this situation while looking forward into the future — five years, 10 years and 20 years from now — and how you expect Vietnam will deal with this challenge?

**IFPSS:** The South China Sea is an area essential to the national survival of Vietnam. Vietnam has a clear maritime policy. We have set the goal of increasing the contribution of maritime activities to GNP to 60% by the year 2020.

Specifically, we will take two measures — expanding maritime investment and enhancing international cooperation to promote efficient development of marine resources.

As measures to protect marine resources, we will pursue diplomacy and enhance Vietnam's effective capability.

As for diplomacy, we will first of all strengthen international cooperation regarding maritime issues. Second, we will reinforce the mechanism of multilateral cooperation regarding maritime issues.

Enhancing Vietnam's effective capability means strengthening the maritime force, including the navy. In these fields, we believe that there is huge potential for cooperation with Japan. We strongly hope to deepen the Vietnam-Japan partnership.

**IFPSS:** The security of the South China Sea is critical to Japan in terms of safeguarding a sea lane. Should China bring the South China Sea under its control, it would pose a serious risk to Japan. Japanese companies have made a vast amount of investments in Asian countries. If the security of the South China Sea is not safeguarded, countries that have heavily invested in Asian nations will suffer a considerable disadvantage.

China's propaganda machine is insisting that the disputes in the South China Sea will not affect the freedom of navigation at all on the ground that they are bilateral problems. China is thus trying to prevent intervention by third-party countries. After ensuring that those disputes remain bilateral problems, China intends to force weaker countries to subordinate themselves to its will by demonstrating its power.

As for the freedom of navigation, it is important not only to ensure free passage of ships but also to facilitate legitimate trade and economic transactions. In reality, however, China is obstructing shipping trade by Japan and other countries. For example, oil development and exploration companies have suffered significant damage.

Vietnam attaches importance to the security of the South China Sea and the freedom of navigation in the sea. Therefore, we believe it is important to cooperate, whether directly or indirectly, with countries which have stakes in the South China Sea. Such cooperation will not be an attempt to internationalize the disputes in the South China Sea but an effort to resolve them in practical ways.

**JINF:** We totally agree with your argument that diplomacy and effective capability are critical to resolution of the disputes in the South China Sea. If we are to use international cooperation to resolve these disputes, which China is trying to turn into bilateral issues, our major goal for the moment should be to establish a binding code of conduct, we would say. Instead of following the international maritime law (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea), China is single-mindedly pursuing the “divide and rule” approach based on the military doctrine of Sun Tzu (an ancient Chinese military strategist). China has been applying this approach against Japan in an attempt to drive a wedge to break the Japan-U.S. alliance. The conflict between modern international laws and China’s ancient strategic thinking has been a headache for Japan, and we would presume it is also a headache for Vietnam as well as for the United States.

To enhance effective capability, we think we will need to accomplish three tasks — strengthening military power, reinforcing existing alliances and forming cooperative relationship with new partners. What would you say to the idea of facing up to China against the background of the Japan-U.S. alliance while tackling these tasks?

**IFPSS:** The security situation in the South China Sea is like a volcano waiting to erupt. There is a very high risk that China’s strategy for controlling this region could trigger the eruption. There are four countermeasures we should take to prevent that.

First, Japan and Vietnam should have a shared perspective on their common interests and risks. To share perspectives, we should regularly exchange opinions with each other.

Second, in addition to strengthening cooperation between Japan and Vietnam, we should also reinforce cooperation with other Asian countries. We hope to cooperate with Japan over marine resource development in particular. We would also like to cooperate with Japan in strengthening the framework for maritime enforcement activities and in enhancing our capabilities, including the naval power.

Japan is providing yen loans (long-term, low-interest loans intended to support developing countries) and ODA (official development assistance) to Vietnam. Until now, such financial support has been targeted at transportation and infrastructure projects in principle. In the future, I hope that Japan will consider providing yen loans in the field of maritime activities. If Vietnam’s surveillance capability is enhanced and

contributes to the safeguarding of the security of the South China Sea, it will bring significant benefits to Japan as well. That is the third countermeasure we should take.

Fourth, we should consider collaborating with the Japan-U.S. alliance. Maritime security cannot be achieved by just one country or two. We hope to use international partnership to achieve our common goal of safeguarding the security of East Asia.

What we are doing now is securing Vietnam's sovereignty, territorial integrity and judicial authority. We are also promoting maritime economic activities, such as fish farming.

Furthermore, we are strengthening our military power, including the navy. Vietnam has a very distinctive concept of a "people's war." In short, our policy is that a war is not something that should be fought only by soldiers but it also requires the participation of citizens. Now, the Vietnamese government is promoting the settlement of citizens in islands off the coast of our country and supporting their life there. For example, we have formed a human defensive line on islands off Central Vietnam. This is based on the concept that each and every citizen forms part of our defensive line. On the Paracel islands, we built Buddhist temples and sent six priests to live there. We also built schools and medical clinics as well as typhoon shelters. The presence of these facilities makes it possible for fishermen to land on the islands and to perform everyday-life activities there as needed, including sending children to school and receiving medical treatment.

**JINF:** Around two years ago, Prime Minister Dung announced the opening of the Cam Ranh Bay to other countries and called for port calls by vessels from around the world, including warships. Indeed, American warships visited the Cam Ranh Bay port for maintenance. May we take that as an expression of Vietnam's willingness to welcome an important role by the U.S. Navy in the security of the South China Sea?

**IFPSS:** Vietnam's policy is to welcome vessels from any country so long as the purpose of their visit is to promote regional peace and security. But we will strongly oppose port calls intended to undermine the peace and security.

**JINF:** Last year, a media report asserted that Vietnam's naval commander had asked India to station an Indian naval ship at Nha Trang. Is that true?

**IFPSS:** Vietnam has a military partnership with India. It purchased missiles from India. Also, we are receiving support from the Indian navy in various training programs. The purpose of the training is to strengthen Vietnam's naval power so that if a war breaks out, we can immediately counter enemy attacks on our own.

## **Countering China's "Divide and Rule" Approach**

**JINF:** What is your analysis of China?

**VASS:** China's policy changes depending on which country it is dealing with. For example, when dealing with Japan, China's policy is to look forward to the future while reflecting on the past as well. However, when dealing with Vietnam, China's policy is to forget the past and look forward to the future. Therefore, to maintain friendly relationship, Vietnam is dealing with China cautiously.

**VASS:** China is a major power. Vietnam is a small and weak country. Therefore, Vietnam is cautious in dealing with China. We have more than two thousand years of experiences of diplomacy with China. For the past one thousand years in particular, China has exerted pressure on Vietnam in various ways. But Vietnam has maintained its independence and achieved prosperity without subjugating itself to the Chinese pressure.

**JINF:** Between 1945 and now, China has fought 10 major wars. Doesn't that fact pose a threat to us? Vietnam and Japan are peace-loving countries. I would presume China, which poses a threat to Japan, is also a threatening presence to Vietnam.

**VASS:** There are significant differences between Japan and Vietnam. Japan is a highly-developed country compared with Vietnam. In addition, Japan has a military alliance with the United States. That is a very important factor. China is allocating a large portion of its budget to strengthen its military power in line with its economic development, so the country poses a serious threat to Vietnam.

**JINF:** Since November 2011, the United States has returned to Asia in earnest in a strategic policy shift. We expect most ASEAN countries will ride on this broad trend. What about Vietnam?

**VASS:** Vietnam hopes to strengthen partnership not only with the United States and India but also with other countries around the world, including Russia, Australia and, of course, Japan.

**JINF:** As you mentioned at the beginning, China clearly changes its negotiating tactics depending on which country it is dealing with. Regarding the South China Sea, for example, Vietnam argued that the areas that extend along the continental shelf belong to its territorial waters, while China insisted that the two countries' territorial waters should be demarcated along the median line between their coasts. However, regarding the East China Sea, China is making the opposite argument; namely, it is insisting that the areas that extend along the continental shelf belong to its territorial waters, compared with Japan's argument that the demarcation should be made along the median line between the two countries.

To protect Vietnam's interests in the South China Sea and Japan's interests in the East China Sea, we must take two measures.

First, we must acquire a sufficient military power to serve as a deterrent against China. Even if we strengthen our military power, that does not necessarily mean we will use it. China has always said this: "We maintain a strong military power so that by demonstrating it, we can overwhelm our opponents, sap their will to fight and make them subjugate themselves to us." If we are to win a "peaceful victory" through diplomacy, we need to have a significant military power. We are entering an era in which we should acquire a sufficient military power to serve as a deterrent against China.

Second, we should make China confront with the values that mankind should aspire to in the 21st century. The disputes in the South China Sea have occurred because China has unilaterally behaved in a heavy-handed manner. It is important to keep reminding China and the international community that the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and other international rules should not be trampled on.

**VASS:** Vietnam is suffering pressure from China on all fronts. That was also the case when Vietnam joined the WTO (World Trade Organization). Vietnam is now actively conducting negotiations toward the conclusion of the TPP (Trans-Pacific Partnership) agreement, and this move is drawing strong opposition from China. By the way, do you think TPP could be used as a means to resolve the disputes in the South China Sea?

**JINF:** We think so. TPP is an initiative to move the international community closer to universal values and rules, such as democracy and international rules, through individual countries' economic and trade activities. China is responsible for 80% of the violations of intellectual property rights around the world. Chinese technologies are innovations stolen from other countries. Japanese and American technologies have been stolen by China on a massive scale. However, if the TPP takes effect, signatory countries must pay for the use of each other's intellectual property rights under transparent rules. If China is incorporated into the TPP, its economic growth will slow down only because it will lose its ability to abuse other countries' intellectual property rights. Whether we will join the TPP or conclude a bilateral FTA with China is the question of whether we reject or accept Chinese rules.

Vietnam has fought and won wars with France, the United States and China. Please don't assume Vietnam is a small and weak country.