

Renewing the Mindset of Proactive and Comprehensive International Integration in Vietnam

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Abstract: *As part of their leadership in the innovation process, our Party and State have followed policies of opening the economy, transforming into a market economy and integrating into the global economy. Meanwhile, our Party has gradually expanded and perfected its awareness of the need for proactive, active, comprehensive, and extensive international integration in accordance with the country's conditions and practical requirements. It contributes to boosting economic growth; ensuring security, sovereignty, territorial integrity and enhancing the country's position internationally. This article focuses on clarifying Vietnam's proactive innovative thinking and its active, thorough, extensive international integration from two perspectives: (1) renovating foreign policy thinking and (2) renovating international integration thinking.*

Keywords: *international integration; renovating thinking; foreign policy thinking.*

Currently, international integration has become a characteristic feature and a major trend in the development of the modern world, dominating and determining international relations, interactions between nations, and changing the structure of regions and the globe. For Vietnam, international integration is a strategic policy that is linked to the country's internal development needs and arises from the trends and changes in the external international environment. International integration with the viewpoint of being “proactive and active, comprehensive and extensive” is a process of exploration, experience, and continuous renewal of perception about the world as well as external relation thinking based on international trends, especially the trend of promoting national interests, preserving traditional values and identity, absorbing the quintessence of human civilization, adhering to the fundamental principles of contemporary theories on international relations and the requirements of regional and global realities.

1. Renewal of external relation thinking

In the formulation of foreign policy and direction, the most important thing is to have an accurate perception of the objective development trends of the world. This task is not simple because the world situation is very diverse and constantly changing, and the deep-rooted causes of these changes often originate in historical depth, and are hidden in subjective and objective factors that are not easy to grasp. Therefore, in the process of renovation and international integration, our Party has devoted much effort and intelligence to renewing the thoughts, re-evaluating the global situation, and determining foreign policy and direction. Over the past 35 years, the renewal of foreign relations thinking has been demonstrated through the following main contents: (i) Renewing perception of the characteristics, contradictions, and development trends of the world; (ii) Renewing perspectives on security and development issues, ethnic and class issues, and the gathering of forces; (iii) Renewing direction, policy, guiding ideology, and orientation of external relations. Specifically:

(i) Renewing the perception of the world's characteristics, contradictions, and development trends: In the face of the extremely complex developments in the world, especially after the collapse of the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, the issue of the era has become a hot focus of the struggle of ideas and theories. As V.I. Lenin said, "Only by examining the fundamental differences between eras (not between specific historical periods in individual countries) can we determine our correct strategy"⁽¹⁾. Therefore, without clarifying the nature of the era, it is impossible to determine the country's direction, mobilize the masses, formulate appropriate domestic and foreign policies, and effectively fight against hostile ideologies and actions against the country and its regime. In the face of the fierce struggle of ideas and theories, with a calm and sober attitude, based on scientific analysis, our Party affirmed in the guidelines adopted at the 7th Congress: "World history is going through twists and turns; however, mankind will ultimately move towards socialism because it is the law of historical evolution"⁽²⁾. The 8th Congress of the Party continued to state: "The socialist regimes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe collapsed, temporarily leading to a setback for socialism, but this did not change the nature of the era; mankind is still in a transitional period from capitalism to socialism"⁽³⁾. The 9th Congress once again emphasized: "According to the law of historical evolution, mankind will definitely move towards socialism"⁽⁴⁾. Therefore, in the face of

the changes, the Party remains steadfast in the Marxist-Leninist methodology, affirming the law of historical evolution.

The first new point in thinking is that the Party has correctly assessed and clearly pointed out that the crisis of the socialist system in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe does not equate to a general end of socialism, but rather reveals the errors and deviations in the application of Marxist theory such as subjective and arbitrary actions, cutting corners, underestimating objective economic laws, persisting for too long with the centralized bureaucratic control system, underestimating commodity production and the law of value as well as the role of market mechanisms, and lagging behind in applying the achievements of modern science and technology, causing the economy to stagnate and people's lives to improve slowly. From there, the hostile forces against socialism have exploited these errors and deviations arising within the socialist countries to influence the internal affairs, damage the credibility of the Party and the system, incite riots and overthrow.

Secondly, the Party has boldly adjusted some previous perceptions that are no longer appropriate. Unlike the view on the nature of the times expressed at the 9th Plenum of the 3rd Party Central Committee in 1963, the Party does not consider the victory of socialism and communism on a global scale as a direct possibility but emphasizes the complex and long-term nature of the path towards those goals. Regarding capitalism, on the one hand, the Party points out its nature and contradictions, on the other hand, it objectively assesses the ability of capitalism to adapt to changes in the times, thus no longer considering the collapse of world capitalism as a near-future possibility.

Thirdly, the Party has many new understandings of the contradictions of the times. The Party always emphasizes that the fundamental contradictions in the world still exist and develop, even more deeply, while affirming the content and form of the objective contradictions in the world have many new features. These include "the basic contradiction inherent in capitalism between the increasingly socialized nature of the productive forces and the private ownership system becoming more deeply entrenched", along with the contradiction "between the broad masses of people and the capitalist class, between monopolistic bourgeois groups, transnational corporations, and large capitalist centers that continue to develop"⁽⁵⁾.

Fourthly, the Party has a new approach to the world development trend. Since the 6th Congress, the Party has pointed out the internationalization trend

of the world economy and the formation of a global market; and since the 9th Congress, the Party has emphasized that globalization is an objective trend. Thanks to this, countries can expand their markets for goods and services, take advantage of more investment, technology, information, and job opportunities to develop. This is the positive side of globalization. Besides, the Party also points out that this trend has many negative aspects, as developed capitalist countries still dominate the world market, so the law that “the strong overcomes the weak” still prevails.

From the 9th to the 13th Congresses, the Party has added that “peace, cooperation, and development continue to be the major trend”, which is the sincere desire and aspiration of all peoples, but “they are facing many obstacles and difficulties”⁽⁶⁾. And our Party affirms that “globalization and international integration continue to develop”⁽⁷⁾, while pointing out the emerging contradictory phenomena, including the increase of extreme nationalism, and great power chauvinism.

Thus, the Party affirms the dialectical materialist thinking, the comprehensive, objective, and scientific view of both challenges and opportunities of the international situation. This dialectical view shows the necessity of continuing to adhere to the foreign policy of independence, self-reliance for peace, friendship, cooperation, and development, multilateralization, diversification, and proactively integrating internationally, while being flexible in strategy, enhancing the ability to proactively respond to challenges in international life, in order to maintain a stable peaceful environment, maximizing favorable conditions and resources from outside to serve the country’s development.

(ii) *The Party has a profound innovation in thinking about security and development issues; ethnic and class issues; and the mobilization of forces.* The Party has a deep renewal of thinking about peace and war, security and development, extremely important issues for the destiny of nations, including ours, which deeply affects the formulation and implementation of foreign policies. If the 6th Congress still believed that the danger of nuclear war had never been as great as it was then, the 8th Congress affirmed that “the danger of a world-destroying war has been pushed back”⁽⁸⁾, and the 9th Congress went further by stating that “in the coming decades, the likelihood of a world war is low”⁽⁹⁾.

In the face of political changes in the Asia-Pacific and Southeast Asia at the beginning of the 21st century, from the 9th to the 13th Congresses, the Communist Party of Vietnam identified challenges closely related to

Vietnam's security and development. The Party affirmed that this region "has an increasingly strategic position" but also pointed out the risks of "fierce competition among major powers and many potential instabilities"⁽¹⁰⁾. Disputes over sovereignty, territorial claims, and islands became more intense and complicated. In addition, the Party also recognized the emerging non-traditional security challenges: "Global issues such as peacekeeping, human security, natural disasters, epidemics, social security, and non-traditional security, especially cyber security, climate change, rising sea levels, environmental pollution, etc., continue to develop in a complex manner"⁽¹¹⁾.

These assessments stem from the perception and aspirations of the Vietnamese people as well as the world's people for peace, stability, and development. At the same time, they also indicate that Vietnam's security and development environment will face many new, difficult, and complex issues in the coming period. The above assessment also reflects Vietnam's comprehensive security thinking and places the demand to protect the homeland from early on, from a distance, from when the country is not yet at risk in international integration.

Regarding the issues of ethnicity and class, new thinking reflects a more comprehensive and profound panorama in capitalist countries, where many layers of the population, not just the working class, participate in the struggle for livelihood and democracy. Monopolistic groups, multinational corporations, and large capitalist centers fiercely compete with each other, sometimes leading to economic and trade wars and conflicts. The Party emphasizes that in the new context, "the contradiction between developed capitalist countries and developing countries is increasing"⁽¹²⁾. The Party also points out that "the movements of all these contradictions and the struggles of the working people of all countries will determine the fate of the world socialist system"⁽¹³⁾, because the global socialist system cannot "export revolution" or replace the movements of internal contradictions in socialist countries, which depend on the struggles of the working people of those countries.

In terms of the alignment of forces, in the context of the development of international relations that tend to be dynamic and complex, the old framework of international relations has been disrupted, and many new issues have emerged and impacted the multifaceted interests of Vietnam. The new requirements for aligning forces are, in the process of opening up foreign

relations and integration, to engage with countries with different political and social systems in organizations and alliances to solve international issues based on ensuring the interests of each country. These interests may be comprehensive (solving pressing global issues, issues that are important to humanity) or partial (political, economic, security, or developmental interests). Therefore, the new feature of the Party's thinking on force gathering is more flexible, adaptable, and emphasizes cooperation, avoiding confrontation and war, and resolving all issues through peaceful negotiation. Unlike before when alignment and force gathering were primarily based on political systems and ideological awareness, now the gathering of forces is more "open", comprehensive, diverse in form and composition, and prioritizes national interests.

(iii) *Renewal of foreign policy and approach.* Our Party has undergone profound reforms in terms of foreign policy and approach.

Foreign affairs are of paramount importance as they are not pursued in isolation, but are an extension of domestic policies, serving the three essential requirements of "security", "development", and "international status" of Vietnam. Vietnam's foreign policy always includes the obligation to the nation and the international community. The new thinking in the renewal (Doi Moi) period is that the Party sees maintaining a peaceful and stable environment for socio-economic development as the highest national interest.

Regarding the guiding ideology for foreign affairs, the 3rd Plenum of the Party Central Committee (7th Tenure) emphasized the idea of "maintaining the principles of independence, unity, and socialism while being creative, dynamic, and flexible to suit Vietnam's position and circumstances as well as the changing global and regional situations, suitable for each object we can relate to"⁽¹⁴⁾. The Resolution of the 8th Plenum of the Party Central Committee (9th Tenure) continued to emphasize the guiding principle of independence and unity attached to socialism. In the integration phase, the Party and the State of Vietnam adhere to a foreign policy of peace, independence, self-reliance, and persist in pursuing an open, multilateral, and diversified foreign policy under the motto of "adding friends, reducing enemies", both cooperating and struggling, trying to increase cooperation, avoid conflicts and confrontations, avoid isolation and dependence, and maintaining a peaceful and stable environment⁽¹⁵⁾. At the same time, it affirms that Vietnam is a reliable partner and a responsible member of the international community.

Regarding foreign policy principles, at the 3rd Plenum of the Party Central Committee (7th Tenure) in 1992, the Party set forth and implemented four principles for dealing with international issues: ensuring the highest genuine national interests by successfully building and firmly protecting the Socialist Homeland while combining patriotism with the internationalism of the working class; grasping both cooperation and struggle in international relations, promoting effective cooperation and avoiding direct confrontation, and self-isolation; maintaining independence and autonomy, promoting diversification and multilateralization of foreign relations; emphasizing regional cooperation while expanding relations with all countries, with high importance placed on relations with major powers; and actively participating in regional and global multilateral organizations. Later, the Resolution of the 8th Plenum of the Party Central Committee (9th Tenure) in 2003 introduced the principles of object and partner, dialectically analyzing that there are still aspects of each object that require competition and cooperation, and some partners may have differences and conflicts with our interests. Then, the 10th Party Congress in 2006 added the principle of deepening, stabilizing, and sustaining established international relations.

Regarding the guiding viewpoint, in order to achieve the goals and vision set forth by the Party, the 13th Congress affirmed the need to “ensure the highest national interests on the basis of the fundamental principles of the United Nations Charter and international law, equality, cooperation, and mutual benefit”⁽¹⁶⁾. This is the continuation of the content of “ensuring national interests” that the Party has emphasized in previous congresses. However, in the context of complex and unpredictable regional and international issues where interests are intertwined, the 13th Congress emphasized “ensuring the highest” to unify the perception and actions of all levels and sectors in carrying out the task of protecting national security.

Therefore, in the various stages of our national revolutionary cause under the leadership of the Party, based on the firm and creative application and development of Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh Thought, the constant innovation of thinking in policy planning and implementation has become a rule, a valuable lesson, and an important factor leading to success in the cause of national liberation, unification of the country, and building and protecting the Homeland.

2. Renewing the mindset for international integration

Overall, Vietnam’s opening up to international integration has shifted from

primarily an economic integration mindset to a comprehensive and extensive international integration mindset.

The 7th Party Congress and the “Platform for National Construction in the Transitional Period to Socialism” opened up the first breakthrough that led our country to the path of international economic integration. The 7th Party Congress began to propose the policy of “diversifying and enhancing the efficiency of foreign economic activities”. This means finding ways to mobilize the potential of the economy, promoting relative comparative advantages, both meeting the needs of production and domestic life, and strongly oriented towards export. While rapidly penetrating new markets and expanding regional ones, traditional markets continue to be valued.

The 8th Congress (1996), 9th Congress (2001), and 10th Congress (2006) directly used the concept of international economic integration. In terms of level, it has progressed from proactive economic integration to proactive and active international and regional economic integration, deeper and more comprehensive integration.

The 11th Congress (2011) set the direction of synchronously and comprehensively implementing foreign affairs activities, proactively and actively integrating into the international community. The shift from “proactively and actively integrating into the international economic community while expanding international cooperation in other fields” to “proactively and actively integrating into the international community” was an important development in thinking. In April 2013, the Politburo issued Resolution No. 22-NQ/TW on international integration, which clearly defined the objectives, guiding principles, and directions for implementing international integration in various fields. The policy of proactively and positively integrating into the international community was strongly implemented at the 11th and 12th Congresses. The 12th Congress proposed the policy of “vigorously implementing the strategic orientation for proactive and active international integration”⁽¹⁷⁾, clarifying the guiding principles and major directions of international integration in each field to enhance the effectiveness of international integration. Accordingly, in the coming period, the international economic integration will focus on effectively implementing international commitments, especially with regard to newly signed regional free trade agreements. Political integration will emphasize strengthening and deepening relationships with partners, especially those who play important roles in the country’s development and security,

and putting established frameworks into practice. Actively participating in multilateral mechanisms for national defense and security, including higher-level cooperation activities, promoting integration in cultural, social, scientific-technological, education-training, and other fields will also be strengthened. At the 13th National Congress, the Party's thinking on international integration took another step forward: "proactively and actively integrating comprehensively and deeply into the international community"⁽¹⁸⁾.

So, from the perspective of opening up foreign relations, the international economic integration of the 6th, 7th, and 8th National Congresses of the Party has been further developed in both theory and practice by the subsequent Congresses. This development strongly demonstrates the spirit of inheriting and renewing thinking, adapting to reality, as well as the new position and strength of the country. It also reflects Vietnam's capacity to seize the current situation and ability to build an effective foreign strategy and integration. It is believed that with the Party and State's correct foreign policy and high determination of the entire political system, as well as close coordination between the Party's foreign relations, State diplomacy, and people-to-people diplomacy, we can only achieve the success of the foreign policy and international integration path and achieve the aspiration for prosperous and happy country development, striving "to become a developing country with modern industry and high average income by 2030 and to become a developed country with high income by 2045"⁽¹⁹⁾./.

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