[China and Vietnam tussle](https://nation.com.pk/08-Feb-2019/china-and-vietnam-tussle" \t "_new)

Dr Ahmad Rashid Malik February 08, 2019 the nation

Bilateral relations between the People’s Republic of China and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam have been turbulent despite their common Sinospheric background and adherence to Communism in world politics. Vietnam always thinks that China wants an attempt to dominate it. Following Vietnam reunification in 1975, relations soured between China and Vietnam; the bilateral ties have witnessed a thaw in recent years. However, irritants are still there.

Relations have slightly improved but the two nations are engulfed in the South China Sea disputes. And this trend is continuing. Both nations share a border over 1, 281 km. The good point between the two countries is that exercise the same Communist ideology. This ideology came to Vietnam via Moscow. Ho Chi Minh was a great supporter of this ideology.

However, Communism took a different path in Vietnam and China. Policies were adopted differently in Vietnam and China. Vietnam looked toward Moscow for support. The rift between China and Vietnam widened when China supported the Khmer Rouge who in 1977 began attacking southern Vietnam.

After the normalisation of relations between China and Vietnam in 1991, China found conflict in the South China Sea. The trouble intensified in 2009 when China tabled its nine-dash line with the UN and moved assertively to exercise sovereignty over the South China Sea. Vietnam and China each had different interpretations of their common ideology and differing national interests.

The Vietnamese Government is confronting a rising tide of public anger as its parliament debates a controversial bill to create the three new Special Economic Zones (SEZs) to develop a common platform of development between Hanoi and Beijing. The prospects of developing new SEZs are raising fears of Chinese encroachment on Vietnamese soil. Vietnam has already 18 SEZs set up.

China is Vietnam’s largest trading partner. Bilateral trade has gone up to US$ 100 billion. Vietnam has a significant increase in its trade to China. Vietnamese Government plans to open up at least three new economic zones, but a public protest by Vietnamese did not allow yet. China has Foreign Direct Investment in Vietnam that jumped to US$ 1.4 billion. Around US$ 744 million of investment came from China into Vietnam in 2015, creating a large number of jobs for the local population. At least ten countries are ahead of it. These included: South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Japan, Taiwan, Samoa, UK, British Virgin Islands, and Hong Kong.

This trend is continuing, and Chinese investors are now more inclined toward Vietnam. China is more interested in developing infrastructure and business in Vietnam. However, many Vietnamese do not trust China and have been protesting. Unlike in Cambodia and Laos, Vietnamese are keep protesting the Chinese. As a result, this has been affecting business and other interaction between the two countries.

Hanoi wants the pact between China and Southeast Asian nations aimed at easing tensions in the South China Sea, to outlaw many of the actions China has carried out across the hotly disputed waterway in recent years, including artificial island building, blockades and offensive weaponry such as missile deployments.

The draft also shows Hanoi is pushing for a ban on any new Air Defence Identification Zone - something Beijing unilaterally announced over the East China Sea in 2013. Historically, Vietnam and China have collided three times.

In April 2018, China and Vietnam agreed that “the two sides should better manage disputes through talks and refrain from taking unilateral actions that may further complicate and expand the disputes . . . At the same time, [we] should promote cooperation at sea, including holding talks on joint exploitation.”

However, Vietnam looks frustrated over the slow pace of negotiations on the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea. China wants to complete these negotiations by 2020 or 2021. China would not seek hegemony or domination in the South China Sea. Vietnam, however, doubts about the Chinese intention.

As far as the U.S. trade war with China is concerned, Vietnam has not gained much of the dispute and also would not be gaining much in the future. However, as far talks on the Code of Conduct is concerned, Vietnam could make these talks difficult for China. These quarter talks are likely to be tougher for China.

Vietnam would put more pressure on China in this regard. It also reveals Vietnam is trying to prohibit any new Air Defence Identification Zone. Additionally, Vietnam wants to clarify the “nine-dash line” according to international laws in the COC, which is proposed by China.

There is a difference in China and Vietnam’s positions on the South China Sea. China adopts a comprehensive stance in dealing with the dispute, taking historical claims as well as UNCLOS into account. Vietnam’s claim relies more on Western ideas, such as UNCLOS, instead of referring to history, which Hanoi used to base its proposals on. Vietnam is trying to internationalise the dispute by seeking the support of other claimants and international powers like the U.S. to contain China. It is believed that Vietnam has to change its claims and intention to accommodate China and its grip in the region.

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