

## THE GEOPOLITICAL PARADIGMS IN MOTION AND VIETNAM'S CHOICE AFTER COLD WAR

LƯƠNG VĂN KẾ<sup>(\*)</sup>

**C**omplicated changes of global politics and the changes of geopolitics' order require a new geopolitical viewpoint to evaluate the global circumstances. This helps to simplify the whole picture of new circumstances as well as reflects geopolitical certain rules. On the basis of clear knowledge of geopolitical regulations, related parties including Vietnam, could find out collaborated solutions so that they can maintain and improve the geopolitical advantage of Vietnam in both East Asia and whole world.

The writing offers two new theories about the movement (motions) of geopolitical related factors then the analysis of Vietnam's axis rotation since the collapse of Soviet Union and socialist countries in Eastern Europe. It is called as Lateral Paradigm: unilateral – bilateral – multilateral and Polar Paradigm: one polar – bipolar – multipolar<sup>(\*\*)</sup>. The foundation of these two theories is the linkage between concepts of international relations theory such as bilateral relationship,

multilateral relationships so on, and definitions as one polar, bipolar order. All of these are considered under the structuralist view.

The article does not only analyze the interactions between internal factors in each paradigm, but also the interactions between these two paradigms. The final purpose of this transformation is to 'polarize' or powerize the nation's global position in the geopolitical order. As stated above, the writing focuses to analyze the three following aspects:

- Concepts of Lateral Paradigm
- Matching Ability between Lateral and Polarity Paradigm
- Vietnam's axis rotation in the geopolitical motions after Cold War (1991).

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<sup>(\*)</sup> Doctor of Science, Faculty of International Studies – University of Social Sciences and Humanities – Vietnam National University Hanoi.

<sup>(\*\*)</sup> In English, there are two synonymous nouns which are used for describing the max as *arch* or *polar*. Author used *polar* because it has the corresponding concept in Vietnamese. "*Arch*" is normally used for describing power distribution in a nation, Polarchy, for example.

## I. Two concepts of geopolitical motions

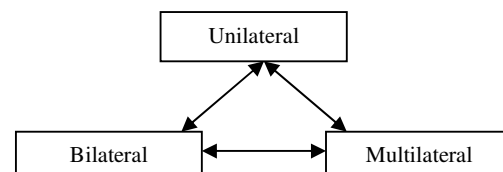
Geopolitics focus on the power of nations, the protection of sovereignty and the improvement of nation position. It is especially interested in the linking progress and international conflicts which related to geographical factors. Chinese geopolitical researchers have recently confirmed that the solution to national security, especially powerful countries, started from The theory of super - geopolitics. It concluded that the aim of national security protection is to ensure no violence of the land power and human rights of local people [1, 111]. Super powers as America, China, European countries and Russia started working on the interactions between geographical positions, international politics and history when doing research on national security policy. Theory on sea power and land power is also a geopolitical viewpoint towards international relations. However, it is necessary to combine theories of international relations and geopolitics to solve global conflicts.

In the progress of doing researches on geopolitics, an important content is the analysis of global political circumstances and national security in key regions, especially between super powers known as pivot area power through analyzing the interactions between politics and geography. On the other hand, this interactions have created interactive paradigms between counties and the order power for different polars. The interaction types and geographical

order can be summarized into two paradigms as followed : Paradigm with unilateral – bilateral – multilateral, and Paradigm with one polar – bipolar - multipolar. These two paradigms have dialectical relationship. They can be consolidated but some time they can also be opposed.

Lateral Paradigm represents the popular methods of international relations. Polar Paradigm, however, has a more specialized scope for global power constellation in a certain period. Discussing about conflicts in East Sea, for example, concepts of both paradigms are always mentioned due to its complicatedness, especially concepts belong the the first paradigm even it has the ambiguity, confusion in mind and knowledge. Hence, Lateral and Polar Paradigms will help to clarify the nature of linking types and international conflicts, for example, East Sea's sovereignty dispute and interactions between related parties.

### 1. Lateral Paradigm : Unilateral, Bilateral, Multilateral



*(Arrows represents the transformation ability between situation)*

Lateral Paradigm reflects how countries get involved and interacted with an organization or a global issue. Apart from the main subjects as nations, regional organizations, international organizations, NGOs, business and even

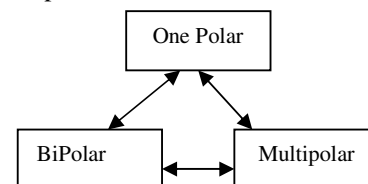
individuals can be subjects of this paradigm. The interactive relationship here can be the constructive collaboration and conversation, or conflicts and arguments. Unilateral means the behavior of only one subject or one party towards issues which are related to one or many other subjects without their response. In contrast, bilateral means the participation of two subjects in an issue or even which related to both sides' benefit. The multilateral characteristic is similar to bilateral with the join of at least three parties to sort out issues. United Nations (UN) and World Trade Organization are two biggest multilateral organizations which members are countries' government. Regional organizations as North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Association of Southeast Asian Nations, (ASEAN), European Union are multilateral or multinational organizations. North Korea and Iran's nuclear or conflicts in East Sea are international and multilateral issues. There is a reality that a multilateral issue is sometime just a bilateral matter in the international relations. Iran's nuclear negotiations, for example, is actually a bilateral talk between Iran and group P5+1 (five permanent members of United Nation Security Council and Germany). The UN has confirmed the bilateral nature and bi – polar characteristic of Iran's nuclear issue from the beginning. However, the P5 + 1 is not a group who has same targets as well as each of them has complicated relationship with Iran.

This has led to the complicatedness of talks between two sides. North Korea's nuclear issue is even more complicated because it could be the multilateral (benefits for more parties) or bilateral (divided into two major groups: Nuclear umbrella for North Korea led by China and a group against North Korea's nuclear led by US)). Geneva Agreements in 1954 on Indochina and Paris Accords (1968-1973) on Vietnam War are also similar examples.

According to the dialectical theory, the issue of lateral paradigm is to consider how the transformation between three types of paradigms as unilateral, bilateral and multilateral operates? The triangle model of three types of lateral paradigm can theoretically create 6 following ability to transfer:

- Unilateral > Bilateral > Multilateral
- Unilateral > Multilateral > Bilateral
- Bilateral > Unilateral > Multilateral
- Bilateral > Multilateral > Unilateral
- Multilateral > Unilateral > Bilateral
- Multilateral > Bilateral > Unilateral

## 2. Polar Paradigm: one polar, bipolar and multipolar



(Arrows represents the transformation ability between situation)

Polar Paradigm represents the significant correlation of geopolitic power between international forces by which the

geopolitic map could be clearly divided into one, two or groups of countries; each group will have its own power or some countries of that group will play key role as a peak to attract all other subjects then form into a force who has same target with other subjects. This will ensure the benefit of group in the order of international power. As a result, the polar paradigm is basically related to power, nations' position in the global power order. That's why the concept of two polars was born in 1990 after the Second World War. Two polars are Socialism group led by Soviet Union and Capitalism led by US. This order only ended after Soviet Union collapse in 1991.

The world was a diversified picture with multi – centers when looking back the changes in the international relations in the human history since the establishment of state nation. Each region was a separated world when not having much interactions with each other at global level. There is not multipolar order but the concept of multipolar world in a pre-globalization. Because societies have developed in different geographical conditions and international circumstances, each region had some developed nations. They are those have more resources, financial ability and talents and turn into the leaders. At the same time, areas started to communicate with each other, especially after the establishment of capital market as well as the discovery of America. It also opens the century of economic globalization in the end of 15<sup>th</sup> century – early of 16<sup>th</sup> century. Global

geopolitics is the multipolar order and all forces become competitors on the way of conquering the world.

Similar to the approach way of lateral paradigm, the dialectical relationship between three types of polar paradigm (one polar, bipolar and multipolar) needs to be clarified in this paradigm's transformation. Also, there are 6 types of transformation in the power order as following:

- One polar > Bipolar > Multipolar
- One polar > Multipolar > Bipolar
- Bipolar > One polar > Multipolar
- Bipolar > Multipolar > One polar
- Multipolar > One polar > Bipolar
- Multipolar > Bipolar > One polar

## **II. Compatibility between Lateral Paradigm and Polar Paradigm**

The relationship between two paradigms are at both external and internal level, from outside and inside, and between form and content. The lateral paradigm reflects the external correlation which is easily to be observed while the polar paradigm represents the inside, conceptual and natural characteristics between subjects based on the real capability. Therefore, two paradigms sometime are correlated but sometime are conflicts. The correlation between Lateral and Polar Paradigm is displayed through multilateral collaborative organizations. One of the good examples is United Nations, established in October, 1945 as the idea of winners in

World War II. The characteristics of multilateral – multipolar are shown at following levels: United Nations General Assembly (193 nations), United Nations Security Council (15 nations), and even the *Security Council's five permanent members* [2, 60].

The incompatibility between lateral paradigm and polar paradigm in the relationship of two neighbourhood countries in which there is a super power and the other one is small and weak country. It looks like bilateral but the nature relationship here is unilateral which is inequal and incompatible due to the super power's pressure. So the bilateral relationship here is actually one polar. It is the same for an international issue, for example, it may be only one polar or bipolar but people see it as a multipolar issue. In NATO, US's role can be easily realized as a fake multilateral one through vital moments or important events.

So is there any opposited case which looks like unilateral or bilateral but turns into one polar or bipolar in reality? It can happen when the combination between groups face with collapse if they can sort out conflicts. In the modern international relationship after incidents during 1989 to 1991, some organizations faced with the similar cases. The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), for example, was led by Russia to balance with Western side as Belarus during the post – Soviet period. However, there were some countries who wants to follow Western sides by participating in NATO (Russia's rival). Gruzia and even

Ukraine under President Yuschenko or some Central Asian countries are examples. Some nations do not follow either Russia or Western sides as Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan. Will CIS have enough strength to face up with that serious situation as an one polar party?

### **III. Vietnam's rotation in the geopolitical order after Cold War**

The Fall of Communism, the end of the Cold War and the collapse of Soviet Union during the period of 1989 to 1991 are the benchmarks for ending the old world order and opening a new century. But it is still the open question of where is the real nature of new world order after two decades. It is because the global geopolitics is still dramatically changing and on its way to find out the best order which brings human a stable and safe growth. Also, the critical issue here is how long we have to wait for that stable pathway? Where Vietnam will go to and will Vietnam be able to choose any polar to follow?

According to some researchers, "Vietnam actually follows the "only one superpower" of China in a certain level". This model showed the purpose of China when confirming its short term role (one of big four) and long term target (to become a super power). This also reflected Vietnam leaders' global thinking. For Vietnam, what is the use of the "only one super power" compass? Firstly, the model could bring Vietnam to come closer to the world reality in comparison with the "multipolar" model

which was applied during 1990s. The “only one super power” formula, however, does not describe about the role of Vietnam toward the whole world. It means that Vietnam would be viewed based on China’s perspective and it could lead Vietnam to follow China’s strategies if the country does not take any notice [3].

The theory of “only one super power” has the most suitable kernel because it is tied to the concept of polary paradigm. The world today, especially Asia Pacific area’s paradigm is in motion “*One Polar > Multipolar > Bi-polar*” (US > US/Japan - China - Russia - India > US - China). In the complicated circumstance of global politics after the end of Cold War, Vietnam’s choice has shown how flexible and intelligent this country’s leaders are implementing their geopolitical foreign strategies. It somehow also pointed that Vietnam has its own position in South East Asia and East Asia. In the early of 1990s, the country was considered as following China after “Cheng Du Conference” due to impacts of Soviet Union collapse. Later on, Vietnam has step by step obtained its own position and become independent. Following is the pathway and the complicated relationship which Vietnam is building and pursuing:

(1) *The tied linkage with China on the foundation of fateful geopolitics*: A border that stretches over thousands of kilometres is not the only thing Vietnam and China share. Each of the two countries also claims ownership of a number of

archipelagos, including Hoang Sa and Truong Sa, which have long been the subject of heated disputes on an international scale. All of these require Vietnam to improve its strategic relationship with China in all fields. This will bring Vietnam a chance to negotiate with China which helps to get back as well as protect territories which are in danger. That “face – to – face” chance will never come once Vietnam turns back with China. Traditional linkages as geocultural, geoeconomical perspectives with China and painful experiences have made the relationship of two countries more intimately. It clearly pointed out a characteristic of geopolitical rule which is called as Finlandization by Western people: the process by which one powerful country strongly influences policies of a smaller neighbouring country.

(2) *Vietnam tries to strengthen the independent ability on China as well as other powerful countries through international policies which are multilateral and diversified*. This is the major policy which aims to recover the isolated circumstance and the geopolitical imbalance in the bilateral relationship with China. In general, Vietnam has successfully opened the entry to ASEAN and become one of key member of this association since its participation in 1995. US also announced the formal normalization of diplomatic relations with Vietnam in this year. In 2000, two countries signed Vietnam – US Bilateral Trade Agreement which opened the gate for Vietnam’s goods to access this giant market. Due to the mutual understanding

and benefits of both countries in Asia Pacific area, the strong growth in the Vietnam – US bilateral relations has brought it up to the level of strategic partnership even it is not an official definition. In future, this strategic relations will get improved when US supports Vietnam to join in Trans – Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership Agreement without China's participation.

(3) *Vietnam tries its best to win the geopolitical influence on two traditional neighbouring countries as Laos and Cambodia.* Laos and Cambodia are geopolitically shields which protect the land security for Vietnam from the back of this country. Vietnam has faced many difficulties when these two neighbouring countries rotated to follow China and ignores Vietnam. Firstly, Vietnam does not have enough resources to compete the investment ability in Laos and Cambodia with China<sup>(\*)</sup>. Therefore, these two countries have different ideas with Vietnam on many issues, including East Sea matter. Secondly, young leaders of Laos and Cambodia are now not those in the same generation who went through hard time in war with Vietnam in the past. This makes the major linkages with Vietnam now only basing on financial factors but this is one of Vietnam's shortages. Today, two countries however still sign with Vietnam bilateral agreement on "not allow third country to use its own land

to fight against another".

(4) *Vietnam tries to improve strategic partnership with Russia, Japan and India in order to gain back the strategic balance.* Vietnamese policy makers's strategic view now focus on Russia who has the competitive advantages of geopolitic with China on the Asian or global map. Moreover, Russian and Vietnamese have the same and forever worry about China's threats on their land. The two – pronged characteristic in the relationship of Vietnam and Russia when this country is at North China and Vietnam is at Southern side. Vietnam's traditional military technology mostly depends on Russia too. Hence, Vietnam considers Russia as a prestige provider of advanced and efficient military technology. Russia is actually better off China. The ability to reach to an agreement which is similar to 1978 Agreement, however, is still out of bounds. Today, Russia is pragmatic and totally different from the old Soviet Union which had the spirit of proletarian internationalism in some Viet people's memories.

Vietnam is an ideal strategic partner for Japan in South East Asia. In Japan's opinion, Vietnam locates in South East Asian center which links with all trading roads, even reach to India after the establishment of many transportation channels which go through Asia. On the other hands, Vietnam has experience of fighting against the violence of China for thousands years. The country has become a strong fortress which reduces the pressure from China toward Japan.

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<sup>(\*)</sup> China has recently planned to build the train line for Laos, worth up to 7 bil USD; Cambodia's infrastructure also received tens of billions of dollar investment.

Vietnam is also got the attention and special support from Japan in East Sea issues so that Vietnam can ensure the safety of its maritime lines then maintains the economy which depends on Japan's foreign trade. Vietnam even has more reason to improve the strategic relationship with Japan in the competition with China in economy and national security. Similar to Japan, the benefits in building a strategic partnership with Vietnam is based on the aim of balancing with China. Vietnam also considers India as an ally who shares geopolitical target to protect national security against China's threats. About military technology, Vietnam can rely on India's ability with medium – range missiles, submarines, and naval officer training.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

The diversification in many international relations is a clear identifiable rule when analyzing it from geopolitical perspective and through historical periods. The global geopolitics of the world is basically biopolar or multipolar, and one polar status is only short term. One polar status is set up by some super powers and depends on many factors, especially internal factors of a nation and which values are pursued by that nation. The Multilateral – Bipolar Paradigm is the dream of nations because this reflects the balance of power between two most powerful sides. This paradigm creates a rather stable geopolitics which meets small countries's benefit demand. However, it is rare and ask all nations to try their

best together to reach the Power Re-balancing once it is broken.

Global geopolitics is in moving phrase from One polar > Bipolar > Multipolar. Vietnam is located in a top strategic position in South East Asia and gets the attention of many nations who want to set up strategic relationship with. The practice of rotating global geopolitics after the end of Cold War has forced Vietnam to quickly adapt and implement a flexible and effective strategy. Geopolitical challenges, however, seems just a beginning for Vietnam at this moment when China has become a super power and shows its idea of controlling small countries in area, especially Vietnam, as well as East Sea. Vietnam therefore needs to have a correct vision of how geopolitical paradigms are moving now so that the country can issue suitable policies for diplomatic treatment such as the pathway of social democracy, the winning in the fighting of corruption and the improvement of national powerful combination. On the other hands, it is necessary to use "human power" to increase strength which can help for national security and land protection, building a democratic and civilized society as developed democratic countries's standards. In the relationship with China, Vietnam was only respected when it was a part of Western countries or followed them. However, the final decision has not been made yet but chances and time do not have much left after China has become a new king in Asia – Pacific in the middle of the 21<sup>st</sup> century □



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