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Navigating Water Policy: Vietnam's Strategic Shift in the Mekong River Basin (2017-2021)

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Abstract

The historic drought and salinity stress experienced in Vietnam in 2020 starkly demonstrated the criticality of wise water diplomacy for the survival of lower Mekong countries, where the urgent need for water and maintaining natural flow are paramount. Consequently, the period from 2017 to 2021 witnessed a notable shift in Vietnam's water diplomacy, focusing on ensuring water security in the region and responding to the actions of upstream countries. This study examines Vietnam's water diplomacy and its pivotal role in safeguarding water security in the Mekong region during the specified timeframe. Employing a qualitative research approach, the study draws upon expert analyses and scholarly articles to shed light on the significance of water security in Vietnam's foreign policy, the profound impact of climate change and water policies on the nation, and Vietnam's proactive involvement in regional and international cooperation mechanisms. The study emphasizes Vietnam's remarkable adaptability and responsiveness to environmental and global changes, further showcasing the country's remarkable flexibility in its foreign policy pursuits.

Keywords*: water policy, Mekong River basin, Vietnam foreign policy*

Introduction

The Mekong Basin is a 795000 km2 drainage along the Mekong River. It is divided into the two branches: the Upper and Lower Mekong. China and Myanmar are lying in the Upper Mekong while Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam are in the Lower Mekong basin. According to the Mekong River Commission in 2018, the Mekong River is one of the world's great rivers with a mainline length of 4880 kilometers. The Upper Mekong Basin stretches from 2.245 kilometers with the stream before entering into Laos and to 2.635 kilometers toward the East Sea (MRC, 2023).

According to the statistics of Mekong River Commission in 2022, the Mekong River Basin is home to around 70 million people including 60 million residing in the Lower Mekong Basin and 10 million people living in the Upper Mekong Basin. This region is considered as one of the most culturally diverse area with an assorted variety of ethnicities. The main sources of income for residents in the Mekong River Basin are hydropower, agriculture and fishing. The Mekong River's water resources come from a range of sources and the Himalayas where is known as the world's water supply, annually provide a significant amount of water

to the Mekong River. Snow and the rainwater supply the north with water while rainfall and ground water are the main water provider from Myanmar to the south. The climate of the Lower Mekong Basin has two seasons: dry season and wet season. The dry season often begins in late September and early October and lasts until the following April, whereas the wet season lasts from May to late September.

However, the flooding is persistent every year in this region and the root of flood is heavy rainfall which results in positive and negative effects. The advantage of annual flood brings fisheries into the basin as well as the amounts of sediments so as to improve the soil fertility. In addition, Floods also play an important role as a natural insecticide by eliminating surplus salt from agricultural soil. Hence, the flood cycle is considered to be a certain extent as a source of livelihood for people in the Mekong River Basin. Most Vietnamese people living in the Lower Mekong Basin depend on the Mekong River to earn their living. As a result, the water diplomacy of Vietnam in this international river to harmonize the national interest and sustainable development is crucial.

This study aims to analyze Vietnam's water diplomacy and its role in ensuring water security in the Mekong region from 2017 to 2021. To achieve this objective, a qualitative research approach is employed, incorporating expert analyses, scholarly articles, and up-to-date information. By utilizing these resources, the study seeks to provide valuable insights into Vietnam's diplomatic efforts regarding water security in the Mekong region during the specified period.

The structure of the study is organized as follows. Firstly, the study provides an overview of the relations between the upstream and downstream countries in the Mekong region. This section explores the complexities and dynamics of the interactions among these countries regarding water resources management in the Mekong River. Secondly, the significance of water security for Vietnam is discussed. This section highlights the importance of water resources for Vietnam's socio-economic development, particularly for the livelihoods of its population. The third section examines the threat posed by hydropower project construction on the mainstream of the Mekong River. This part analyzes the potential impacts of these projects on water availability and the livelihoods of communities in Vietnam. The fourth section explores the shift in Vietnam's policy to adapt to the new challenges in the Mekong region. It discusses the diplomatic strategies and initiatives undertaken by Vietnam to address the potential risks to its water security and promote cooperation among Mekong countries. Finally, the study concludes by summarizing the key findings and providing insights into Vietnam's water diplomacy efforts in the Mekong region.

Relations among the Upstream and Downstream countries

There are some differences between the interests of people who live in the Upper and Lower Mekong River Basin. People in the Upper Mekong do not depend too much on water supply in the Mekong River. The Mekong River is primarily utilized for hydropower projects in this sub-region because the Mekong River runs through the Himalayas and Tibet with the frigid weather of snow and ice. The southern of Mekong River is also passable by water. The

transportation and trade on the river are often centered in the region between China, Laos, and Thailand. In the Lower Mekong Basin, countries need water resources for hydropower and agriculture which are crucial for their living. They share mostly the water supply and flows to irrigation, fisheries and tourism. In addition, citizens obtain the benefits from regular floods which might be a specific characteristic in this region. According to Mekong River Commission in 2018, China and Myanmar cover 189.000 square kilometers in the upstream section which amount to 24 percent of the total basin. Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam are the four remaining downstream nations with a combined area of 606.000 kilometers (76%). These riparian countries distribute the common water resource and handle with necessary environmental issues such as food provision and flood mitigation. All trans-boundary shared water resource help to boost hydrological, social and economic interdependence among nation-states. Every state lying the Mekong River Basin take diverse advantage of Basin such as hydropower, irrigation, fishery, trade.

In the upstream countries, China is considered as a dominating nation in the entire Mekong region and China has made the most of Mekong River's water source by developing hydropower which is promoted in order to convert electricity generating from coal to a green alternative. Additionally, the Mekong River is considered as an economical and accessible transportation route for internal ships which travel from Chinese Yunnan to southern Cambodia. Beside to the hydropower development, China has their ambition to exploit the Mekong by the way that a large number of Chinese cargo ships is easy to access this region so as to promote regional trade (Soutullo, 2019).

In terms of Myanmar, they have abundant water resources but they control only a small percentage of the Mekong. Myanmar's total land area is only 24000 square kilometers. They comprise Shan and Kaching states and border on China and Laos. Furthermore, Myanmar has emerged as a forthcoming competitor in generating the hydroelectric power. (Sanchez, 2019)

In Laos at the Lower Mekong Basin, they call the Mekong River as "Mother Water" and Laos has one of the region's lowest average population and is the landlocked country in the Lower Mekong Basin. Laos has oriented the hydropower development as the main tendency for rapid economic growth. Laos has persistent infrastructure projects in spite of objections from its downstream countries because hydropower will be a plentiful revenue for Laos along the main streams of the Mekong River. Hydropower and mining are also key resource to their economic growth (Koziell & Niroshini , 2022).

According to Thailand, Thais has the same calling the Mekong River as Laos. Besides, the state is seen as the richest Lower Mekong country and Thailand is home to approximately 18 percent of the total Mekong Basin. The Mekong River forms a large segment of the Thai-Laos border, so the harmful effects of upstream dams in Laos and China are also on the north-eastern of Thailand.

In Cambodia, the people are mostly reliant on the Lower Mekong Basin, especially for agriculture because the Mekong River Basin covers about 86 percent of Cambodia's land area. Furthermore, many households depend on the fisheries and flood irrigation from the Mekong

River. In recent year, water quality and ecosystem downstream are impacted on Cambodia's industrial sectors while agricultural sector fascinates the number of labor force, so this raises the concerns about Cambodia's food security (Sanchez, 2019). However, Cambodia has the ambition to develop the hydropower potential of the river. Both tributary and main hydropower will meet energy demands, but they may have far-reaching influence on fisheries, sediments and hydrological mechanism. Additionally, growing rice and fishing are indispensable source of income for inhabitants. Therefore, Cambodia is also one of the most sensitive countries to the negative implication of river flow disruption.

The significance of water security in Vietnam

One of the most concerning non-traditional problem of international relations today is the security of natural resources. Water is now considered as one of strategic resource which need to be secured. The Mekong River is one of the most vital factors contributing to "Vietnam's rice bowl" because the Mekong delta is located at the end of the region where has been enjoyed the fertility of sedimentary accumulation for thousands years. According to Le Anh Tuan's research on Mekong Delta water, there are around 450 billion m^3 of water which comes from the upstream Mekong River. The available groundwater is around 4.5 million m^3 per day (Tuan, 2015). Water security is also crucial to Vietnam's economic growth. Trans-boundary water protection is important because more than 60% the country's surface water coming from upstream states. Over 50% of Vietnam's rice production and 60% of aquaculture depend on sediments and nutrients of Mekong River. However, The Mekong River Basin has made the riparian nations to depend on the water, food, energy intertwiningly and each state has acknowledged that they are exposed by vulnerably climate change which are triggered by others in the role of "the donator" and "the receiver" and climate change has impeded the agricultural development through more frequent severe weathers such as drier droughts, heavier rain falls, wider flooding, much increased temperature and higher raise of sea water level. Furthermore, the climate change is estimated to be worsened by the construction of the dams which will change the river flow from the upstream nations and this distracts the water drainage and flooding, block the stream, fish migration and sediment flows. Besides, it reduces the amount of water and deliver the lowest volume of water to downstream which results in erosion and salt intrusion in the delta. For example, saline intrusion of the Mekong Delta has adversely affected about 80.000 hectares of fruit trees and running water of households in this region (Tue, 2020).

Water consumption will surge in the future owing to rapid urbanization, industrialization, and agricultural development but water resources are not abundant. Therefore, water mismanagement triggered serious consequences and impacted on people's livelihood and economic development. Plus, water management is problematical because every nation has a different growing path and national interest in the Mekong River Basin.

As mentioned above, water is an indispensable component of environmental security because it is linked to security in other sectors and due to the important role of water, the Vietnamese government has always paid more attention to water diplomacy. Recognizing the

importance of water, the Vietnam Government was reforming its water governance. Key goals are defined in the National Strategy on Water Resources in five areas: (1) water resource protection; (2) water resource exploitation and usage; (3) water resource development; (4) mitigation of water-related damages; and (5) improvement of water resource management capacity (Grafton et al., 2019). The water reform objectives were legalized by the Law on Water Resources (LWR) issued in 1998, and revised in 2012, and the Law on Environmental Protection (LEP) issued in 1993, revised in 2005 and again in 2014. The object of the LWR is to provide a legal basis for the management, protection, exploitation and use of water resources, as well as for the prevention, control and remedy of harmful effects caused by water (Bao et al., 2017). The LEP 2014 governs environmental protection activities, including water environment protection.

The threat from hydropower project construction

According to the data of the Mekong River Commission (MRC), the downstream of Mekong basin in the Southeast Asian countries accounts for a total of 79% of the basin with the proportions in Laos (25%), and Thailand (23%) respectively, Cambodia (20%), Vietnam (8%), and Myanmar (3%), while the remaining 21% - the upstream basin, aka Lancang Basin - is located in China.

In the upper Mekong, China has planned a series of hydropower projects on the Lancang River, while in the lower Mekong region, Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand also planned to build 11 hydropower projects on the mainstream, of which Laos has 7 works, Thailand and Laos have 2 joint projects on the border and Cambodia has 2 projects. Since China began to build a series of hydropower projects on the Mekong River in the 1990s, China has put into operation 11 hydropower plants so far and plans to build three more. In the territory of Laos and Cambodia, it is also planned to build 11 works on the mainstream of the Mekong River (Nguyen, 2022).

The new report entitled "Mekong Low Flow and Drought Condition in 2019 - 2023" (MRC, 2022) published by the MRC Secretariat on January 13, 2022, shows that in the past three years, the main flows of the Mekong River has fallen to its lowest level in more than 60 years, with 2020 being the driest year for the Lower Mekong Basin as rainfall falls below normal monthly levels (MRC, 2020). The policy on water resources has been reflected in moves from countries along the Mekong. And this is also the leading factor determining Vietnam's policy change.

China

As an upstream country, possessing nearly half of the Mekong's 4,909km total length, China has an absolute advantage in determining the river's destiny and controlling the access to sustainable water of downstream countries. In the thirst for energy to serve industrialization and maintain economic growth, the hydroelectric power source on 2,200km of Lancang River has been fully exploited by Beijing (Han, 2017). Since 1992, when the Asian Development Bank (ADB) conducted many Great Mekong Subregion (GMS)'s development

programs, China has been making efforts to connect Yunnan and Guangxi provinces (China) with countries in the GMS region (Piman & Shrestha, 2017). For China, the GMS holds a position as a bridge for China to reach out to other regions, especially to ASEAN countries in order to compete with Japan's leading role in Southeast Asia.

After participating in the GMS cooperation, China took a series of measures to carry out the GMS program, such as: establishing a National Research Coordination Group on the development of the Lancang - Mekong Subregion (1994); invested in a series of projects, in which, spent 30 million USD on the construction of the Kunming - Bangkok highway running through Laos; spent 5 million USD for the project to improve the maritime route in the upper Mekong region (Yun et al., 2017). At the Third GMS Summit (in 2008), China promoted cooperation among GMS member countries by committing to spend 20 million yuan (CNY) to conduct a feasibility study of the construction of a railway connecting the eastern part of Singapore with Kunming (China). During the GMS Economic Corridors Forum held in Kunming (China, 2008), representatives of six GMS countries agreed to accelerate the transformation of transport and transport for regional development (Pham, 2021).

From 1992 to 2016, China built and put into use 7 hydroelectric dams and is implementing about 20 more dam projects, creating a chain of continuous reservoirs on the upper Mekong. Among them, the Nuozhadu, Xiaowan, Jinghong, Manwan, and Dachaoshan hydropower terraces have the largest designed capacity and reservoir scale (Nguyen, 2017). Summarizing data on the capacity of reservoirs, it can be seen that the above 7 hydroelectric dams have retained nearly 42 billion m^3 of water or about 40% of the water flow from upstream to the Thai border (Räsänen et al., 2017). There are now 11 dams on the mainstream Mekong River in China, and other dams have also been built on tributaries of the Mekong River (Akarath, Ian & Zeb, 2021).

The historic drought and salinity event in 2016 at Mekong Delta (Vietnam) was a testament to China's role of "guarding water" and its ability to control the Mekong River. Most of Lower Laos, Northeast Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam's Mekong Delta had been severely damaged by extremely dry weather. In the context of agricultural growth plummeted to 1.36% (the lowest level since 2011) (Kura et al., 2017) leading to many social disturbances due to lack of fresh water, Vietnam had to petition China to release water. Even though reservoirs are the main cause of downstream water shortages, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs quickly issued a statement justifying that El Nino was the main culprit (FMPRC, 2016), denying the role of hydroelectric reservoirs and decided to overcome difficulties and do the best they can to help countries cope with drought.

China's release of the Jinghong Dam for a month to increase the flow of water in the downstream area helps polish the country's diplomatic image (Yanjun, 2017, p.17) on the one hand, but on the other hand, is a signal of the long-term dependence on the country with the role of regulating Mekong river's upstream water. Despite facing international criticism (Diplomat, 2016), it is clear that China's "water weapons" are putting Vietnam at a disadvantage on the Mekong diplomatic forum, especially when China vetoes participation of United Nations Watercourses Convention (UNWC)

Myanmar

In the 1995 Mekong Agreement, only four countries involved are Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam while a river basin needs the full participation of all countries. China and Myanmar are not currently members of the international Mekong River Commission; instead, they are just dialogue partners. Therefore, the international Mekong River Commission needs a stronger involvement of China and Myanmar to cooperate more in the long-term development of the Mekong River basin (Vnembasy-oslo, 2015). In the case of resolving issues of common interest, the absence of cooperation and mutual binding will weaken the common settlement mechanism of the region.

Laos

Hydropower dam construction exploded throughout the 2010s, especially in Laos, China, and Cambodia. In Laos, there were 61 hydroelectric dams as of February 2019. The build-operate-transfer (BOT) model has been used to create the majority of projects. Under this model, private businesses invest in projects for which they have concession agreements, and after a predetermined amount of time—often 25–30 years—the projects are transferred to the Lao government.

Additionally, 36 hydropower dams were built at various stages in early 2019. In addition, the Laotian government intended to start producing 10,000 MW more power by 2020 and 20,000 MW more by 2030. Some have referred to Laos as "the battery of Asia" given current estimates of rapidly rising installed capacity and Laos' energy exports to neighboring nations (Mirumachi, 2020). This description has also been given to China's Yunnan Province due to its prospective hydropower capacity. Xayaburi Dam and Don Sahong Dam are Laos' first mainstream dams and be completed in 2020. After completing the first two dams, which are being built by Thai and Malaysian corporations, the Lao PDR government is moving quickly to build the remaining seven dams on the main Mekong. The link between the Mekong and other Southeast Asian nations in terms of energy trade is not just a financial issue; it is also strongly driven by the political interests of numerous parties (WRM, 2022).

Cambodia

The 400 MW Lower Sesan 2 Dam in Cambodia, the country's biggest dam to date, started building in 2014 and was finished in 2018. Studies have also been conducted regarding the possible development of the Sambor Dam in the mainstream Mekong River, although reports suggest that the project has recently been set aside for at least a decade (Akarath, Ian & Zeb, 2021).

On March 18, 2020, Cambodia announced that they would not build any new hydroelectric dams on the Mekong for the next decade. The river's biodiversity could be further damaged by developing projects. The Cambodian government's decision to postpone the construction of new hydroelectric dams on the Mekong has been welcomed by campaigners (Lohani et al., 2017). This is expected to save tens of thousands of people who depend on the rich resources of this river.

Cambodia's decision means that Laos is the only country in the lower Mekong basin with plans to develop a hydroelectricity sector, with governments in the Mekong River countries focusing on generating energy from the sun and wind instead of hydroelectric.

Thailand

According to a 2016 announcement, in the period 2016-2026, Thailand will implement the Kong - Loei - Chi - Mun project to divert water from the Mekong River to the northeast. The total investment cost for the project is about 75 billion USD. However, the project was met with strong opposition from the Thai people. Or the Mekong - Huai Luang - Nong Han - Lam Pao route project was also approved by Thailand in early 2016. The project is expected to build about 30 reservoirs near the confluence of tributary rivers to divert and store water into these reservoirs. As a result, we can see that water security for the agricultural industry in Thailand is also a top concern.

In recent years, Thailand is also one of the countries heavily affected by the change in Mekong river flow from upstream dams, so many criticisms have been issued by the Thai government (Li et al., 2017). Typically, Thailand has opposed the construction of the $2 billion Sanakham dam in Laos since the end of 2020. Despite protocol, government officials in Bangkok openly criticized the project in the media (Marwaan, 2021).

In general, all countries on the Mekong River have their water policies to protect their interests in the same flow. In particular, the Chinese factor is still the leading factor affecting water security in the region by countries in the Mekong sub-region in general and Vietnam in particular. These policies have greatly influenced Vietnam's decisions in its efforts to adapt and respond to the shortage of water resources downstream.

Vietnam's Mekong policy shift

In 2015-2016, the huge impacts of climate change and the policies of countries on the Mekong River, combined with extreme weather have led to serious consequences for the Mekong Delta region of Vietnam. Because the 2015 rainy season came late and ended early, the upstream flow of the Mekong River was deficient, and the water level was the lowest in the past 90 years, so saltwater intrusion appeared nearly two months earlier than the same period every year which seriously affecting agricultural production (Vncold, 2016). The drought and saltwater intrusion in 2016 was assessed as particularly severe, the worst in the past 100 years, causing heavy damage to the Mekong Delta region of Vietnam. According to statistics from the Central Steering Committee for Natural Disaster Prevention and Control in Vietnam:

1. In terms of cultivation, the 2016 dry season due to a lack of fresh water and salt intrusion appeared two months early and ended late, with nearly 340,000 hectares (total of 1.55 million hectares) of winter-spring rice crop were affected by drought and salinity; of which 104,000 hectares of rice were severely damaged, tens of thousands of hectares were killed. For the first time in many years, the agricultural sector grew negative (DWRW, 2017).

2. Regarding water for domestic use, there were about 194,000 households (about 900,000 people) and schools, clinics, hotels, and factories that lacked water.
3. Regarding aquatic products, the amount of evaporation is large and the lack of fresh water affects the growth of aquatic species (DMC, 2016).

At the first conference on sustainable development of Mekong Delta to adapt to climate change, Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc affirmed the Government's consistent stance on the development of the Mekong Delta: respecting the laws of nature, choosing a model of adaptation to nature, and being favorable to the weather and nature is the main thing, and avoiding interference brutally into nature, develop sustainably under the motto of living with floods, living with salinity, drought, and lacking of water, suitable to actual conditions (Kinna & Rieu-Clarke, 2017).

After the conference, on November 17, 2017, Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc signed and promulgated Resolution No. 120/NQ-CP. The Resolution sets out a vision to 2100, a target to 2050, guiding views, guidelines, and strategic orientations for the development of the Mekong Delta, overall solutions, and specific tasks in the coming time (Dinh Tuyen, 2021). Vietnam has been acknowledging the need of a long- term vision and the importance of international cooperation to resolve the vulnerability of Mekong Delta Region (MDR), so the Vietnamese government enforced the Resolution 120 on "Climate Resilience and Sustainable Development of the Mekong Delta Region" and it was considered as Vietnamese calling "Thuan Thien" – "Adapting to Nature Resolution".

According to Resolution 120, Vietnam's Mekong River diplomacy has three main operational directions (Vu & Nguyen, 2021). Since then, Vietnam began to vigorously implement the Mekong River water diplomacy.

First, coordinate bilateral and multilateral cooperation with countries upstream of the Mekong River, as well as with major basins and river deltas in the world. Second, promote Vietnam's active participation in the Mekong River Commission (MRC), in existing cooperation mechanisms of countries in Mekong, and in cooperation mechanisms among countries in the Mekong and partners. Third, develop strategic partnerships with other countries and international development partners to mobilize external resources (financial capital, knowledge, and technology) to solve the problem of climate change and promoting sustainable development in the Mekong Delta (Vietnam). The National Committee on Climate Change, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are tasked with implementing these goals.

In general, through these three main directions of activities, the strengthening of bilateral and multilateral cooperation between Vietnam is still emphasized as the central role of foreign policy based on existing mechanisms in the Mekong. Currently, in the Mekong region, there are about 15 cooperation mechanisms which are divided into two groups: the group of intra-regional mechanisms (cooperation between the countries of the Mekong basin) and the group of cooperation mechanisms between Mekong Basin countries and external partners.

Group of intra-regional mechanisms: Mekong River Commission (MRC), Greater Mekong Subregion Cooperation (GMS), Mekong - Lancang Cooperation (MLC), Cambodia – Laos – Vietnam Development Triangle Area (CLV), Cambodia - Laos - Myanmar - Vietnam (CLMV), Strategy for Economic Cooperation on Three Rivers Ayeyawadi – Chao Praya – Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS), ASEAN-Mekong basin Development Cooperation (AMBDC).

In these intra-regional mechanisms, activities have been actively implemented by Vietnam. At the 3rd Summit in Cambodia (April 2018), Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc asked the MRC to focus on the content of fair, reasonable, and sustainable use of river water resources; strengthen the full, substantive, and effective implementation of the 1995 Mekong Agreement as well as the MRC's set of procedures and regulations; improve the effectiveness of the MRC's supervisory and coordinating role in implementing the commitments of member states; develop a basin development planning framework in harmony with the water resources planning of member countries; propose several initiatives to improve the effectiveness of cooperation on sustainable development and environmental protection.

In the field of trade and investment, Vietnam has effectively participated in trade and investment facilitation activities within the framework of the GMS, including simplifying customs procedures and facilitating goods and services, granting travel rights to transport in the territory of the GMS countries. Vietnam also chairs the trade-investment working group under the ACMECS and CLMV mechanisms. In the CLV cooperation, Vietnam plays a leading role, taking the lead in reviewing and re-planning the triangle development until 2020, building its website in four languages (Vietnamese, English, Lao, and Cambodian), assisting Laos and Cambodia in building many main roads linking border provinces, building border markets, border checkpoints, etc (Le, 2018).

Under the CLMV mechanism, Vietnam has also built a CLMV scholarship fund to regularly provide scholarships to three countries: Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar. This is one of the first 58 pilot projects to be implemented and is also one of the outstanding results of the CLMV cooperation mechanism. Regarding data sharing, in November 2018, the Vietnam National Space Center signed a memorandum of understanding with MRC on the use of satellite data from the Vietnam Data Cube system in monitoring and evaluation water and other resources in the Mekong River Basin. At meetings held under the intra-regional cooperation mechanism, Vietnamese officials highlighted the critical situation of the Mekong Delta and called on member countries to cooperate in water resource management and promote sustainable development in the region (DWRM, 2021).

The group of cooperation mechanisms with partner countries outside the region includes Mekong-Langcang Cooperation (MLC), Mekong-US Partnership, Mekong-Japan cooperation, Mekong-ROK cooperation, and Mekong – Ganga cooperation (Le, 2021). Based on these mechanisms, Vietnam has oriented to actively participate in the initiative "A Decade toward the green Mekong Innitiative" (Mofa, 2009) in Mekong-Japan cooperation. Vietnam has also succeeded in bringing the content of water cooperation into the Mekong - Lancang

mechanism. Additionally, Vietnam plays a leading role in environmental cooperation with the US in the Lower Mekong Innitiative (LMI).

In November 2020, Vietnam co-hosted the 10th Mekong-Korea Foreign Ministers' Meeting and the 12th Mekong-Japan Summit Meeting. In January 2021, Vietnam and the US co-hosted the first Friends of the Mekong Policy Dialogue within the framework of the Mekong-US Partnership (U.S mission to ASEAN, 2021).

Moreover, international cooperation on water resources is about survival. The Mekong sub-region has appealed to the global powers such as the U.S, Japan, South Korea, Australia and India to engage with the riparian nations because of its economic potential and geopolitical significance and especially promoting strategic partnerships with other nations and international development partners to muster external resources with the aim of tackling climate change and promoting sustainable development in the Mekong Delta Region. In 2021, Vietnam has cooperated with more than 20 development partners during carrying out the 120 Resolution. Vietnam has been committed to loan a total of US $ 2.2 billion to put the Resolution into practice (Vu & Nguyen, 2021).

Considerably, the World Bank is one of Vietnam's most active and largest partners. This organization has collaborated with Vietnam in three important fields such as: environment sustainability, inclusive economic growth and human resource. Another long-term partner of the MDR is Netherlands and Resolution 120 emphasized the importance of reinforcing the strategic partnership with the Netherlands on climate change adaption and water management which was established in 2010. Moreover France, Germany, and the European Union have also gave their approval and commitment to the implementation of Resolution 120. Vietnam is promoting countries in the basin to cooperate in exploiting and using resources sustainably and equitably, including water sources, based on harmonizing interests with sustainable development goals. Especially, expanding and strengthening strategic partnerships to respond to climate change (including important cooperation mechanisms and partners such as the Vietnam-Netherlands Intergovernmental Committee on Climate Change Adaptation and Water Management, EU, the US, France, Germany, Japan, and World Bank) (Nhandan, 2019) is also the concern. In addition, proposing the establishment and building of new cooperation frameworks with other countries, organizations, and international partners; make the most of external resources, including investment capital, and science and technology to support the sustainable development of the Mekong Delta.

In Vietnam's unremitting efforts, most recently, the 7th MLC Foreign Ministers' Meeting was held in Myanmar with the attendance of heads of foreign ministries of MLC member countries. Speaking at the conference on July 4, Vietnam Foreign Minister Bui Thanh Son said that in the post-pandemic period, MLC countries need to prioritize economic growth and sustainable development, setting goals to bring benefits to the people.

Generally, Vietnam has transformed from a passive position in water security issues under the unpredictable impacts of climate change and other countries' river water policies to become more proactive in addressing these issues and difficulties that exist by Resolution 120.

In Resolution 120, two clear directions have been clearly outlined in the shift of water policy, including both internal and external. In particular, on internal affairs, Resolution 120 sustainable development goals of the Mekong Delta, adaptation to climate change. This is considered a historic resolution, because never before has the Mekong Delta region of Vietnam received big decisions as well as synchronous infrastructure investment projects for sustainable development as in the past years. The Resolution is a breakthrough policy on development to create sustainable development in the Mekong Delta, adapting to climate change, and being safe and prosperous. In addition, regarding foreign affairs, this resolution also oriented appropriate diplomatic activities not only with countries in the Mekong River Basin but also with external countries to call for cooperation, support and learning from international friends. The combination of both domestic and foreign policy shifts in Vietnam's water resources has marked a big step forward in solving problems in the Mekong River. Cooperation in solving common problems is important, but more important is Vietnam's self-adaptation and self-solution for the immediate difficulties.

Conclusion

Water security has become a key issue in the foreign policies of countries, with appropriate adaptations over the years. Especially for Vietnam, a country located in the lower reaches of the Mekong River, water diplomacy is vital for a fertile delta and the lives of millions of people. The two biggest mechanisms affecting water resources include climate change and the water policy of countries in the river basin, which have directly put Vietnam in a difficult position, and forced to adapt to nature and human. From the birth of Resolution 120 by the nature of natural adoption and the consolidation of foreign policy on the Mekong River as well as the activities to implement the policy, it has reflected the highly adaptive nature and Vietnam's quick response to environmental and international changes.

Vietnam's active activities in cooperation mechanisms in the Mekong region have also contributed significantly to the development of internal and external mechanisms as well as the development of the entire Mekong region and Vietnam. At the same time, Vietnam has taken the initiative to include water resources, environmental protection, and sustainable development in programs and documents of larger regional and international organizations and forums such as ASEAN, APEC, ASEM. This is also a signal showing the flexibility in Vietnam's foreign policy.

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