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How Vietnam is shaping post-COVID relations with the US, China, Russia and South Korea

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has reshaped the global political landscape, forcing countries to adapt their foreign policies to new realities. Vietnam, a key player in Southeast Asia, has faced the challenge of recalibrating its diplomatic strategies in light of both the pandemic and emerging global trends. This study seeks to answer the question: How has Vietnam adjusted its foreign policy towards key global powers in the aftermath of COVID-19? Focusing on its relationships with the United States, China, Russia, and South Korea, the research examines the motivations, strategies, and methods Vietnam has employed to enhance its diplomatic standing and secure economic and political interests. By analyzing Vietnam's responses to the shifting global order, this paper provides a nuanced understanding of how smaller nations navigate global disruptions. The findings contribute to the broader discourse on international relations, offering insights into how middle powers like Vietnam maintain relevance and influence in a post-pandemic world.

Keywords: Geopolitical strategies, Global diplomacy, Global disruptions, International partnerships, Middle power, Southeast Asia.

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1. Introduction

In the context of globalization and the profound changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, countries worldwide have faced new challenges in adjusting their foreign policies to align with the evolving global landscape. Vietnam, as a

developing nation with a strong diplomatic foundation, has also adapted its foreign policy to maintain stability and foster growth in its international relations. However, these adjustments in Vietnam's foreign policy post-COVID-19 have not been comprehensively explored, particularly regarding its strategic relationships with major partners such as the United States, China, Russia, and South Korea [1-3].

This study aims to analyze the adjustments in Vietnam's foreign policy following the pandemic, focusing on the motivations and methods employed by the country to strengthen its relations with these key strategic partners. Notably, the paper will examine how Vietnam has utilized the Bamboo Diplomacy strategy, a highly adaptable and flexible diplomatic approach, to maintain and enhance its international standing amidst a volatile global environment.

Vietnam has made several significant adjustments to its foreign policy, yet much of the existing literature focuses on these policies during the pre-pandemic era or merely describes the progress without delving into the underlying motivations or specific outcomes [4-7]. Therefore, this study provides a more in-depth analysis of how Vietnam has flexibly adjusted its foreign policy in response to the post-pandemic international environment. Additionally, this paper integrates a theoretical framework combining Realism and Liberalism [8] to elucidate the underlying drivers behind Vietnam's foreign policy adjustments in the post-COVID-19 context.

The primary research questions of this paper will focus on clarifying the changes in Vietnam's foreign policy before and after the pandemic, as well as the diplomatic achievements Vietnam has made during this period. Specifically, the study will analyze the factors that have driven Vietnam to adjust its strategic relationships with the United States, China, Russia, and South Korea, as well as the role of Bamboo Diplomacy in achieving national objectives [1].

In this study, four countries, the United States, China, Russia, and South Korea are chosen for analysis due to their unique strategic significance for Vietnam's foreign policy in the post-COVID-19 context. These countries represent Vietnam's major economic and security partners and embody distinct opportunities and challenges, thereby highlighting Vietnam's flexible and dynamic "Bamboo Diplomacy" strategy.

The United States was selected as a critical strategic partner, and Vietnam has steadily expanded its economic, trade, and defence relations since diplomatic normalization in 1995. The bilateral partnership has deepened significantly in economics, education, and technology, reflecting mutual interests in various sectors. During the pandemic, the United States provided critical support to Vietnam through vaccines and medical equipment, laying the foundation for expanded cooperation. Analyzing relations with the U.S. clarifies how Vietnam engages as a global superpower while maintaining an independent and balanced foreign policy stance [9-11].

As Vietnam's largest neighboring country and top economic partner, China maintains deep-rooted economic and trade relations with Vietnam. However, these ties are also accompanied by complex territorial and regional security issues, particularly regarding sovereignty in the South China Sea. Consequently, China represents one of the most crucial aspects of Vietnam's foreign policy, illustrating the balance between economic collaboration and national sovereignty protection. By including China, this study demonstrates how Vietnam's Bamboo Diplomacy effectively sustains cooperative relations with China while upholding core national interests [12-14].

Russia is chosen due to its long-standing significance in Vietnam's security and defense sector. Dating back to the former Soviet Union era, the Vietnam-Russia relationship has evolved into a comprehensive strategic partnership, especially in areas such as energy and defense. Russia is a traditional partner and a major supplier of military equipment, thus supporting Vietnam's defense capabilities. Analyzing this partnership highlights Vietnam's commitment to long-term strategic relationships, particularly defense and security [15-17].

South Korea is Vietnam's significant investment and trade partner, with thousands of South Korean enterprises operating in Vietnam. During the pandemic, South Korea provided vaccine aid to Vietnam, strengthening bilateral cooperation in healthcare, technology, and innovation. Moreover, as part of its New Southern Policy, South Korea views Vietnam as central to its economic and diplomatic outreach in Southeast Asia. Examining relations with South Korea underscores how Vietnam leverages economic partnerships to enhance national strength, demonstrating the adaptability of its diplomatic approach [18-20].

Throughout this study, the term "South Korea" is used consistently to avoid any confusion with North Korea, ensuring clarity and precision in the analysis. Given South Korea's critical role in Vietnam's diplomatic and economic development strategy, this approach provides greater coherence when discussing bilateral ties.

Selecting these four countries enables a comprehensive view of Vietnam's strategic foreign relationships, showcasing how Vietnam maximizes diverse alliances to strengthen its regional and global position. Each country represents a unique dimension of cooperation that Vietnam optimizes, ultimately reinforcing its standing through a resilient and adaptable foreign policy.

2. Analytical Framework

This article applies a combined analytical framework based on Realism and Liberalism in international relations to explore Vietnam's diplomatic adjustments with key strategic partners, including the United States, China, Russia, and South Korea, in the post-COVID-19 context. This approach allows for an in-depth analysis of Vietnam's diplomatic motivations and orientations from two primary perspectives: securing national interests and regional stability (aligned with Realism) while pursuing multilateral cooperation grounded in shared interests and international commitments (aligned with Liberalism).

This analytical framework will be applied consistently throughout the article to ensure that each diplomatic relationship is examined descriptively and through theoretical insights. The combined Realist and Liberalist approaches clarify how

Vietnam balances interests among major partners while maintaining independence and adaptability in the dynamically shifting post-COVID-19 global landscape.

A distinctive feature of Vietnam's foreign policy is the concept of "Bamboo Diplomacy," introduced by General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong during the 32nd Diplomatic Conference in 2021 [1]. This concept symbolizes the resilience, flexibility, and steadfastness of Vietnam's approach to international relations. The bamboo metaphor, with its supple and sturdy characteristics, is used to describe how Vietnam navigates complex international relations with an adaptable yet unwavering stance in protecting core national interests.

From a theoretical perspective, Vietnam's Bamboo Diplomacy reflects a harmony between Realism and Liberalism. In its relations with China, Vietnam demonstrates flexibility by fostering economic and trade partnerships while maintaining a firm stance on sovereignty issues. This approach enables Vietnam to reap economic benefits without excessive dependence. Similarly, in its relations with the United States and South Korea, Vietnam actively seeks to strengthen strategic cooperation and promote shared regional security, trade, and healthcare initiatives. Notably, during the COVID-19 crisis, as Vietnam required support from these nations, Bamboo Diplomacy allowed Vietnam to secure immediate healthcare assistance while building long-term strategic relationships. Finally, in its relationship with Russia, Bamboo Diplomacy enables Vietnam to strike a balance between defense, energy cooperation, and preserving traditional ties. It strengthens Vietnam's defense capabilities and national security and allows Russia to be a conduit to the Southeast Asian region through Vietnam's role in ASEAN.

3. Research Methodology

The research methodology is structured into three main steps: data collection, comparative analysis, and theoretical alignment, all of which aim to provide a comprehensive and in-depth view of Vietnam's diplomatic adjustments.

Firstly, data collection focuses on two primary sources: historical events and public policy documents. The study draws on secondary data from official Vietnamese government sources, such as reports from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, key policy documents, and speeches by Vietnamese leaders at international conferences. These documents are crucial for understanding how Vietnam has adjusted its diplomatic strategy with significant partners. In addition to offering a broader perspective and enhancing the empirical basis, reports from international organizations, including ASEAN and the United Nations, and scholarly articles from international journals are also referenced. Concurrently, empirical economic data from financial institutions such as the World Bank highlights economic dimensions within Vietnam's foreign relations. Data on trade, foreign direct investment (FDI), and economic aid during the pandemic not only provide a clear illustration of bilateral relationships between Vietnam and its partner nations but also furnish concrete evidence of the pandemic's impact and the response measures undertaken by Vietnam.

Secondly, comparative analysis evaluates differences in Vietnam's diplomatic approach toward each partner before and after the pandemic. Historical comparison identifies shifts in strategic priorities and Vietnam's evolving approach to cooperation across different periods. It clarifies how Vietnam has adapted to meet new challenges in a rapidly changing global landscape. Additionally, international comparisons among countries reveal Vietnam's flexibility and differentiated approach in its relations with each partner. For instance, while relations with the United States and South Korea center on economic and healthcare collaboration, relations with China and Russia are built on security and political foundations. This method clarifies contrasts among bilateral relationships and contributes to a comprehensive overview of Vietnam's diverse diplomatic strategy.

To ensure consistency, all data and analytical results are closely aligned with the analytical framework based on Realism and Liberalism in international relations. Through the lens of Realism, policies related to national security and sovereignty protection, such as those concerning relations with China and Russia, are examined as efforts to ensure stability and national independence. Conversely, economic data regarding relations with the United States and South Korea are viewed through a Liberalist perspective, explaining the tendency towards cooperation and mutual dependence grounded in shared interests and long-term commitments. This combination strengthens the argument that Vietnam has flexibly applied its Bamboo Diplomacy strategy to adapt its foreign policy in a way that is both consistent and sustainable.

Finally, all analytical results and collected data are synthesized into an overview of Vietnam's foreign policy in the post-COVID-19 context, demonstrating Vietnam's agile adaptability and flexible approach. Supplementary quantitative data provide empirical evidence that clarifies the progress achieved by Vietnam while simultaneously affirming the success of Bamboo Diplomacy in enhancing Vietnam's standing and establishing robust relations with international partners.

3.1. Post-COVID-19 International and Vietnamese Context

The COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally reshaped the global political, economic, and social landscape, exposing vulnerabilities and accelerating shifts in international relations. As the world begins to recover, countries are faced with the dual challenge of rebuilding economies while navigating a rapidly changing geopolitical environment. In this context, Vietnam, like many other nations, must adapt its foreign policy and strategic priorities to cope with both global changes and its national interests. The post-pandemic world presents both challenges and opportunities, requiring flexible, responsive policies to maintain stability and foster growth [1].

The global economy has experienced profound disruptions due to the pandemic, with supply chains interrupted, international trade slowed, and growth forecasts revised downward. Developed nations, particularly those in the West, have deployed massive economic stimulus packages and implemented accelerated vaccination programs, facilitating their recovery. In contrast, developing countries, including many in Southeast Asia, faced more significant obstacles in accessing vaccines and securing financial aid. These disparities have accentuated the growing economic divide, particularly within

regions like Southeast Asia, where countries such as Vietnam have had to contend with uneven recovery rates across different sectors of the economy [21].

For Vietnam, the post-pandemic economic recovery has been relatively swift compared to other regional economies, but the country still faces significant challenges. Economic recovery has been uneven across sectors, with industries such as manufacturing and agriculture rebounding more quickly than services and tourism. Additionally, Vietnam's dependence on global supply chains, especially from China, and its reliance on export markets have created vulnerabilities that must be addressed in the long term. However, Vietnam's resilience has been evident, and the country has positioned itself as one of the fastest-growing economies in Southeast Asia post-pandemic, benefiting from its strong export sector, notably in electronics and textiles [22].

The global geopolitical environment has also been reshaped by the pandemic, with the United States and China emerging as the dominant powers in a renewed great power rivalry. This competition has exacerbated existing tensions, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region, which has become a focal point of global strategic competition. For Vietnam, which shares deep economic and security interests with both the U.S. and China, managing this rivalry is a delicate balancing act.

In particular, Vietnam faces significant challenges in maintaining its diplomatic independence while engaging with major powers. As China continues to assert its regional dominance through economic and military means, Vietnam's strategic autonomy is tested, especially concerning issues like the South China Sea, where China's territorial claims conflict with Vietnam's sovereignty. On the other hand, Vietnam's growing ties with the United States, both economically and strategically, offer opportunities for greater cooperation in areas such as defense, trade, and public health. However, this partnership must be managed carefully to avoid exacerbating tensions with China, with whom Vietnam shares long-standing economic and political ties [4, 5].

Moreover, the pandemic has highlighted the necessity of multilateral cooperation to address global challenges such as health security, climate change, and economic recovery. As a member of ASEAN and various global institutions like the United Nations, Vietnam has committed itself to playing a larger role in shaping global responses to these issues. The post-pandemic era offers a platform for Vietnam to advocate for more inclusive, multilateral approaches to address global health, environmental, and economic challenges, aligning with the broader regional goal of promoting sustainable development [23].

Vietnam's foreign policy in the post-COVID-19 era has been characterized by an emphasis on "Bamboo Diplomacy", which combines flexibility, adaptability, and resilience. This approach enables Vietnam to engage with a range of global powers while protecting its sovereignty and national interests. Bamboo Diplomacy has become especially crucial as Vietnam navigates complex relationships with neighboring countries and seeks to deepen its participation in global and regional initiatives. Vietnam's continued commitment to multilateralism within organizations such as ASEAN and the United Nations reflects its strategy of engaging with both regional partners and global institutions to secure its long-term strategic goals [24].

Additionally, Vietnam's foreign policy will continue to prioritize economic diplomacy, leveraging trade agreements such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and its growing ties with the European Union [25]. Vietnam is also expected to increase its cooperation with other emerging economies in the Global South, sharing experiences on managing the pandemic and exploring joint efforts in areas like technology transfer and development aid. This will be crucial in diversifying its foreign policy options and ensuring greater resilience in the face of future global challenges [26].

Moreover, Vietnam's role in facilitating dialogue within the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and other regional frameworks will enhance its standing as a key player in the region. In these forums, Vietnam can contribute to shaping discussions on climate change, trade, and security, solidifying its position as an important actor in the evolving global order [27].

On the domestic front, the pandemic has underscored the need for Vietnam to accelerate its digital transformation and sustainable development efforts. As a country with a young, dynamic workforce, Vietnam is well-positioned to capitalize on opportunities in technology, e-commerce, and clean energy. These sectors will be critical to its post-pandemic recovery, driving economic growth and job creation. However, the rapid pace of digitalization and technological change also poses challenges in terms of digital infrastructure, education, and training for the workforce [28]. The pandemic has also highlighted the importance of strengthening Vietnam's social safety net, particularly in areas like healthcare, unemployment support, and public welfare. As the country continues to recover economically, ensuring that the benefits of growth are more equally distributed will be crucial for maintaining social stability and fostering long-term development [29].

The post-COVID-19 world presents both significant challenges and opportunities for Vietnam. While the global economic recovery is underway, the complexities of navigating geopolitical tensions, economic interdependence, and domestic transformation remain significant. Vietnam's continued commitment to Bamboo Diplomacy, multilateralism, and strategic partnerships with key global players, particularly the U.S. and China, will be crucial in securing its long-term national interests. By focusing on economic resilience, regional stability, and sustainable development, Vietnam is positioning itself as a key player in shaping the future of the Indo-Pacific region and the global order.

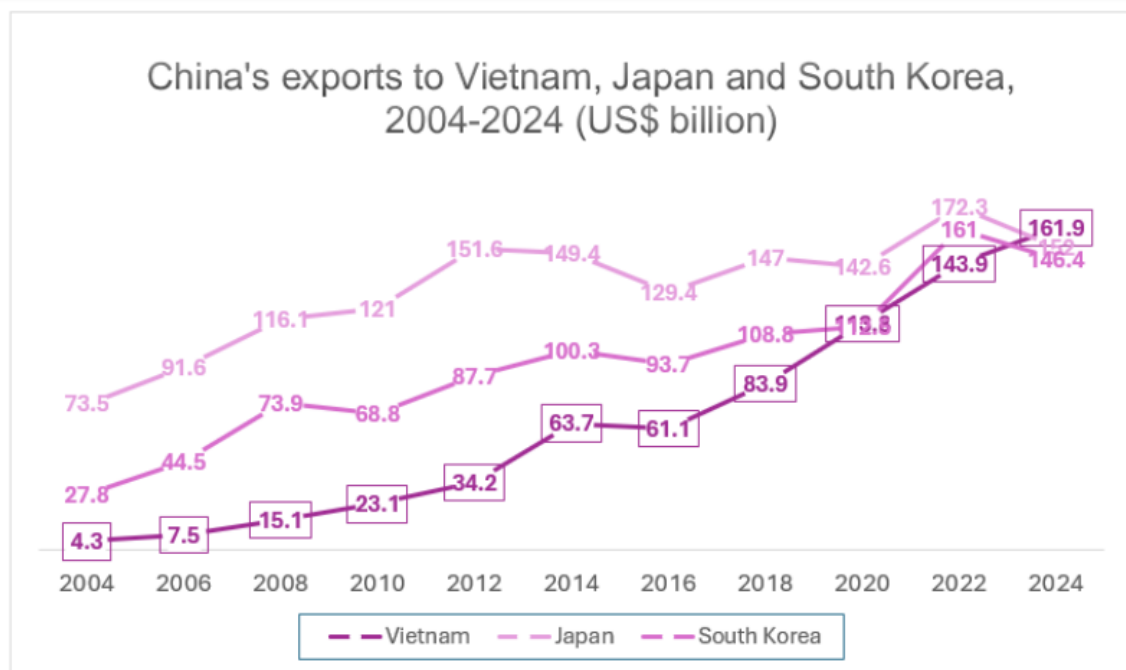
3.2. Enhance International Relations With Key Partners

3.2.1. China

In the post-COVID-19 context, China remains a crucial partner for Vietnam, particularly in the areas of trade, investment, and regional security. As two neighboring countries with deep historical ties, their relationship is defined by both cooperation and competition.

China is Vietnam's largest trading partner, and bilateral trade between the two countries has continued to expand, particularly in manufacturing, agriculture, and electronics. The pandemic highlighted the vulnerabilities of global supply

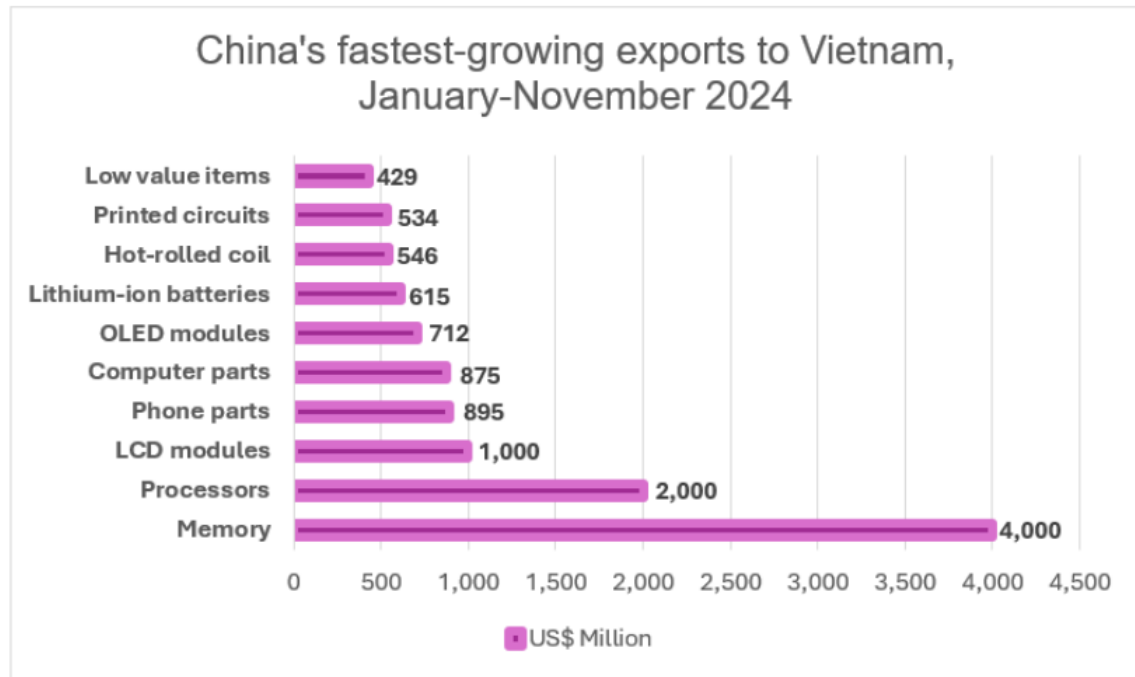
chains, but it also provided an opportunity for Vietnam and China to reevaluate and strengthen their economic ties. Vietnam's fast-growing economy and its manufacturing sector make it a key partner for China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which focuses on infrastructure development across Asia. This partnership presents an opportunity for Vietnam to leverage Chinese investment in critical infrastructure projects, such as transportation and energy, to support its economic growth. However, challenges remain, particularly in the form of trade imbalances and Vietnam's growing dependence on Chinese imports, especially in the fields of machinery and raw materials. This dependency could be problematic if trade tensions or political issues between the two countries escalate [30].



Source: Bloomberg

Figure 1.
China's Exports to Vietnam, Japan, and South Korea (2004–2024).

This figure illustrates the growth in China's exports to three key East Asian partners, Vietnam, Japan, and South Korea over a 20-year period, highlighting Vietnam's rapid rise in import volume.



Source: Bloomberg

Figure 2.

China's Fastest-Growing Export Categories to Vietnam (January–November 2024).

Source: <https://www.vietnam-briefing.com/news/vietnams-trade-performance-in-2024-how-to-read-the-data.html/>.

The figure highlights key product groups that experienced the most significant growth in export value from China to Vietnam in 2024, with memory chips and processors leading the list.

Despite the strong economic ties, the South China Sea remains a contentious issue in the Vietnam-China relationship. Vietnam has consistently opposed China's territorial claims in the South China Sea, which are not recognized by international law. The increasing militarization of disputed areas by China has raised concerns for Vietnam's national security, and the issue of freedom of navigation in the South China Sea is one where Vietnam and China have differing positions [31]. The post-pandemic era has not seen a resolution to these tensions, and as China continues to assert its presence in the region, Vietnam faces a delicate balancing act. Vietnam seeks to safeguard its sovereignty and protect its maritime resources, while also maintaining a stable and mutually beneficial economic relationship with China [4].

In this context, Vietnam has adhered to a policy of "cooperation while maintaining firmness," whereby it continues to engage economically with China while also firmly defending its territorial claims. This approach reflects Vietnam's broader foreign policy strategy, which seeks to balance cooperation with major powers while prioritizing national interests [32].

While the South China Sea remains a sensitive issue, other sectors provide significant opportunities for deeper cooperation between Vietnam and China. One such area is digital transformation and technology. China has become a global leader in fields such as 5G technology, artificial intelligence (AI), and big data. As Vietnam seeks to modernize its economy and build a digital economy, China's technological expertise presents an opportunity for collaboration. The two countries can expand cooperation in sectors such as smart city development, e-commerce, and digital infrastructure [33]. This partnership could also extend to areas like green energy and renewable resources, where China has made substantial progress and where Vietnam is looking to diversify its energy mix [34].

Beyond bilateral cooperation, the Vietnam-China relationship is shaped by their respective roles in the broader regional and global context. As the world's second-largest economy, China plays a pivotal role in regional stability, and its policies directly impact the economic and security environment in Southeast Asia. For Vietnam, maintaining a stable and mutually beneficial relationship with China is crucial to its broader foreign policy strategy, particularly within the context of ASEAN and its engagements with other global powers like the United States and the European Union.

Vietnam's relationship with China is also influenced by global shifts in power dynamics. As the U.S.-China rivalry intensifies, Vietnam finds itself in a delicate position, balancing its economic dependence on China with its security interests in a region where American influence is also growing. Vietnam's position in this geopolitically sensitive region requires careful navigation to avoid being caught in the crossfire of larger global conflicts while simultaneously advancing its own national interests [35, 36].

The people-to-people exchanges between Vietnam and China also play a role in strengthening the bilateral relationship. Historically, there has been cultural exchange through trade, migration, and educational programs, and these have grown in importance in recent years. The Vietnamese diaspora in China has served as a bridge between the two nations, facilitating economic, cultural, and educational exchanges. Moreover, Chinese language programs, cultural events, and educational exchanges have provided opportunities for mutual understanding and trust-building, which are essential for maintaining long-term stability in their relationship [37].

The Vietnam-China relationship in the post-COVID-19 era is multifaceted, with both opportunities and challenges. While the economic and trade ties between the two countries remain robust, particularly through infrastructure investment and collaboration in technology, the geopolitical tensions in the South China Sea remain a significant point of contention. Vietnam's approach to China continues to be one of pragmatic cooperation combined with a firm stance on territorial integrity and national sovereignty. The Bamboo Diplomacy strategy, with its emphasis on flexibility and resilience, allows Vietnam to navigate the complexities of this relationship while safeguarding its strategic interests in the region and maintaining economic growth. As the global and regional landscape continues to evolve, the future of the Vietnam-China partnership will depend on both countries' ability to manage their differences and capitalize on shared opportunities.

3.2.2. America

In the post-COVID-19 era, the relationship between Vietnam and the United States has evolved into a comprehensive and strategic partnership, built on shared interests in trade, security, and regional stability. Over the past two decades, the two countries have made significant strides in deepening their economic ties, particularly in the areas of trade, investment, and defense cooperation [6, 38]. The COVID-19 pandemic, while disrupting global supply chains and highlighting vulnerabilities in international relations, has also underscored the necessity of continued collaboration between Vietnam and the U.S. to address mutual challenges and opportunities [2].

The U.S. is one of Vietnam's largest trading partners and its economic ties have only strengthened in the post-pandemic period. Vietnam's robust manufacturing sector and rapidly growing economy make it an attractive destination for American investment, particularly in areas like electronics, textiles, and agriculture. The pandemic disrupted global supply chains, but it also provided an opportunity for both countries to recalibrate their trade strategies, ensuring greater resilience in the face of future crises. For Vietnam, continued access to the U.S. market remains a vital component of its economic growth, while the U.S. benefits from Vietnam's strategic position in Southeast Asia as a key player in the regional economy [4].

However, challenges remain, particularly in the realm of trade imbalances and intellectual property concerns. The U.S. has consistently urged Vietnam to strengthen its intellectual property protections and address concerns related to trade practices. While the trade relationship has flourished, there are still areas of contention that need to be addressed to ensure long-term, balanced growth [39]. Additionally, the competition between China and the U.S. in the region places Vietnam in a delicate position, as it seeks to balance economic partnerships with both powers while safeguarding its national interests [40].

The COVID-19 pandemic has also highlighted the importance of health security and cooperation in public health between the U.S. and Vietnam. The U.S. has provided significant support to Vietnam in terms of medical supplies, vaccines, and expertise in pandemic response. Both countries have recognized the importance of strengthening their health systems and have committed to continued collaboration in public health to address both immediate and long-term challenges [2]. This partnership has expanded beyond the immediate response to COVID-19, encompassing joint efforts in global health governance, vaccine distribution, and preparedness for future health crises. The U.S. has played a key role in assisting Vietnam's efforts to improve healthcare infrastructure and expand access to medical services.

The strategic partnership between Vietnam and the United States is also reinforced by shared concerns over regional security. The Indo-Pacific region, in which both countries have significant interests, has become a focal point for diplomatic, economic, and military cooperation. As tensions in the South China Sea continue to rise, the U.S. has expressed its strong support for Vietnam's stance on freedom of navigation and territorial disputes in the region. This collaboration in security matters is critical for Vietnam, as it seeks to maintain its sovereignty and security in the face of growing regional tensions, particularly with China [38].

Beyond traditional security cooperation, the U.S. and Vietnam have worked together on counterterrorism efforts, cybersecurity, and the broader issue of regional stability. The U.S. has been a key partner for Vietnam in strengthening its defense capabilities, conducting joint military exercises, and sharing expertise in cybersecurity and intelligence. Vietnam, in turn, benefits from the security assurances that come with U.S. support in the region, particularly as both countries navigate the complex dynamics of the Indo-Pacific [41].

Despite the strong strategic partnership, challenges exist in the relationship between Vietnam and the United States. One of the main challenges lies in the ongoing trade imbalances, with Vietnam's trade surplus with the U.S. raising concerns about unfair trade practices. Additionally, the issue of human rights and freedom of expression continues to be a point of contention, particularly as the U.S. raises concerns about political freedoms and civil liberties in Vietnam. These issues may at times strain the bilateral relationship, as Vietnam navigates its desire to maintain sovereignty and pursue its economic goals while balancing international pressures [38].

Cultural and educational exchanges have also played an increasingly important role in strengthening the Vietnam-U.S. relationship. The U.S. remains a top destination for Vietnamese students seeking higher education, and this people-to-people connection fosters mutual understanding and cooperation. Additionally, cultural diplomacy, particularly through programs promoting Vietnamese culture and American culture in both countries, has helped build trust and goodwill. The role of the Vietnamese diaspora in the U.S. is also vital, as it bridges the gap between the two nations and contributes to greater cooperation in business, education, and cultural exchanges [42].

The relationship between Vietnam and the United States in the post-COVID-19 period continues to evolve, with both countries benefiting from shared economic, security, and cultural interests. While challenges remain, particularly in areas such as trade imbalances and human rights, the opportunities for collaboration in emerging sectors like technology, public health, and regional security are vast. The Bamboo Diplomacy strategy has allowed Vietnam to navigate these challenges and maintain a flexible approach in its engagement with the United States. As both countries continue to build on their

partnership, the Vietnam-U.S. relationship will play a crucial role in shaping the geopolitical and economic landscape of the Indo-Pacific region.

3.2.3. *Russia*

In the post-COVID-19 era, the strategic relationship between Vietnam and Russia remains vital, grounded in decades of cooperation across various sectors, particularly defense, energy, and trade. While the pandemic has complicated global diplomatic relations, it has also underscored the importance of maintaining strong partnerships between nations with shared strategic interests. For Vietnam, Russia remains a key partner in ensuring national security, energy security, and in navigating the shifting geopolitical landscape. The post-pandemic period, however, presents both challenges and opportunities for the two countries to deepen their engagement in new and evolving sectors [25, 43].

Historically, Russia has been an indispensable partner for Vietnam, particularly in defense and energy cooperation. Russia has long been one of Vietnam's primary suppliers of military equipment and technology, and the two nations share strong ties in energy, especially in oil and gas exploration in the South China Sea. Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, these areas of cooperation remain central to the bilateral relationship. Russia's ongoing support for Vietnam's defense modernization, as well as its contributions to energy security, is crucial to Vietnam's strategic positioning in the region [44].

However, while Russia continues to play a critical role in Vietnam's defense and energy sectors, the economic cooperation between the two countries has not reached its full potential. Despite the importance of the energy sector, Russia's broader economic engagement with Vietnam has been limited. The economic sanctions imposed on Russia in response to its geopolitical actions and the global economic downturn have presented obstacles to greater trade and investment flows between the two nations. This has been particularly evident in sectors beyond energy, where Russia has struggled to attract substantial foreign investment into its industries [45].

One of the major challenges facing the Vietnam-Russia relationship is the geopolitical uncertainty stemming from Russia's ongoing conflicts, notably the war in Ukraine, and the broader international sanctions regime. Vietnam, which traditionally adheres to a policy of non-alignment, faces a delicate balancing act in maintaining its strong ties with Russia while managing its relations with other global powers, particularly the United States and China. The shifting geopolitical dynamics require Vietnam to be cautious, ensuring that its engagement with Russia does not compromise its broader foreign policy objectives [46].

However, these challenges also present opportunities. Russia's economic difficulties in the aftermath of the pandemic and international sanctions have spurred the country to look for new markets and partners, opening up opportunities for Vietnam to engage more deeply in areas such as technology, agriculture, and infrastructure development. Vietnam's fast-growing economy and its position in Southeast Asia make it an attractive partner for Russia as it seeks to diversify its economic relationships and mitigate the impact of Western sanctions [47].

As the world shifts toward a more multipolar order, Vietnam and Russia have the potential to expand their cooperation in several new sectors. One such area is science and technology, where Russia has made significant advances in areas like artificial intelligence (AI) and space exploration. These fields represent significant opportunities for Vietnam to enhance its technological capacity and expand its scientific research collaborations with Russia. The two countries can deepen their partnership by co-developing innovations in renewable energy technologies, smart infrastructure, and cybersecurity, sectors where both nations are keen to make progress in the face of global challenges.

In addition to these high-tech collaborations, the defense sector remains a key pillar of the bilateral relationship. Russia's expertise in advanced weaponry and military technologies continues to be of paramount importance to Vietnam as it modernizes its armed forces. The two countries have consistently engaged in joint military exercises and the exchange of defense technologies, which helps strengthen Vietnam's defense capabilities and its strategic autonomy in the face of regional threats [48]. As Vietnam increasingly diversifies its defense partnerships, Russia remains an essential partner in ensuring the country's security in the Indo-Pacific region.

Russia's strategic importance to Vietnam is not limited to defense and energy. As Vietnam seeks to diversify its foreign relations and strengthen its position on the global stage, Russia plays a critical role in supporting Vietnam's efforts to navigate complex international relations. In particular, Russia's backing in multilateral organizations such as the United Nations and its participation in regional frameworks like the ASEAN Regional Forum and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) provide Vietnam with opportunities to advance its interests in a cooperative, multilateral context [49].

Vietnam's engagement with Russia in these multilateral settings ensures that it remains an active player in shaping regional and global policies, particularly in the context of regional security and economic integration. Russia's support for Vietnam's sovereignty, particularly in the South China Sea, and its willingness to cooperate on broader regional issues like climate change and trade further solidify the bilateral partnership in a rapidly changing global environment [50].

The Vietnam-Russia relationship in the post-COVID-19 period is marked by both continuity and adaptation. While traditional areas of cooperation in defense and energy remain central, new opportunities are emerging in sectors such as high-tech industries, energy diversification, and science and technology. The strategic partnership between the two nations continues to evolve, reflecting their shared interests in securing regional stability, advancing economic resilience, and navigating the challenges of a multipolar world. Through the lens of Bamboo Diplomacy, Vietnam has managed to engage with Russia in a manner that ensures mutual benefits while balancing its broader geopolitical interests and maintaining its strategic autonomy in a rapidly changing international system.

3.2.4. *South Korea*

In the post-COVID-19 context, South Korea remains a critical partner for Vietnam in East Asia, with both countries strengthening their multifaceted relationship across economic, cultural, and security domains. The pandemic has heightened

the importance of this bilateral partnership as both nations seek to recover from the global health crisis and address new challenges in regional and global stability. With complementary economic structures and shared strategic interests, Vietnam and South Korea have found new avenues for collaboration, which are expected to define their relationship in the coming years [3, 51].

Economic ties between Vietnam and South Korea have long been a cornerstone of their relationship, and this cooperation has been further solidified in the post-pandemic period. South Korea is one of Vietnam's largest foreign investors, with significant investments in manufacturing, technology, and infrastructure. The pandemic disrupted global supply chains and exposed vulnerabilities in international trade; however, it has also presented an opportunity for both countries to recalibrate their economic strategies. South Korea's technological expertise, particularly in electronics and automotive production, offers Vietnam the chance to modernize and diversify its industrial base. On the other hand, Vietnam's growing consumer market and strategic location in Southeast Asia make it an attractive partner for South Korean companies looking to expand in the region [52]. Vietnam's expanding manufacturing capabilities, particularly in the electronics sector, align with South Korea's focus on high-tech industries, thus offering a win-win scenario for both countries [53].

The COVID-19 pandemic also highlighted the importance of collaboration in public health between Vietnam and South Korea. Both countries faced similar challenges in managing the health crisis, and their partnership in vaccine distribution and pandemic response has proven essential. South Korea, with its advanced healthcare system and expertise in managing public health crises, provided valuable support to Vietnam in terms of medical supplies and knowledge sharing. The post-pandemic era has further opened opportunities for deeper collaboration in global health governance, where both countries are working together to enhance regional health security and preparedness for future health challenges [54].

Vietnam and South Korea also share significant strategic interests, particularly regarding regional security and stability. As tensions in the Indo-Pacific region have intensified, notably with China's growing influence, the partnership between Vietnam and South Korea has become increasingly important. South Korea's geopolitical position in East Asia, coupled with its strong ties to the United States, makes it a key partner for Vietnam as both countries seek to balance China's expanding presence in the region, especially in the South China Sea. While Vietnam maintains a non-aligned foreign policy, its growing partnership with South Korea offers a complementary approach to safeguarding its national security while ensuring regional stability [55, 56]. Furthermore, both countries have supported ASEAN's central role in the regional security architecture, reinforcing their shared commitment to peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific.

While the relationship between Vietnam and South Korea has strengthened, several challenges remain. One major challenge is the growing competition in sectors such as electronics, where both countries are leading players in the region. As Vietnam becomes a more competitive manufacturing hub, there is a potential risk of trade imbalances or friction over intellectual property and technology transfer. Additionally, the economic dependence on each other in specific sectors, such as automotive production and electronics, may pose risks if supply chains are further disrupted or if external geopolitical factors affect their trade dynamics [53, 57].

However, these challenges also present opportunities for further cooperation in emerging industries, such as digital transformation and renewable energy. Both countries have recognized the need to adapt to the changing global environment and have actively explored collaboration in technology, digital infrastructure, and clean energy. Vietnam, with its ambition to modernize its economy, can benefit from South Korea's expertise in smart cities, renewable energy technologies, and digital infrastructure. South Korea, in turn, benefits from access to Vietnam's growing market and its strategic location in Southeast Asia as a hub for regional trade and investment [58, 59]. These evolving sectors could be key areas where both nations further strengthen their cooperation.

Cultural diplomacy has become another important aspect of the Vietnam-South Korea relationship. South Korea's Hallyu (Korean Wave), which includes K-pop, Korean cinema, and television dramas, has had a significant cultural impact on Vietnam. This cultural influence fosters greater understanding between the peoples of both countries, contributing to stronger ties on the people-to-people level. Additionally, educational exchanges have increased, with more Vietnamese students studying in South Korea, particularly in fields such as technology and business. These exchanges help solidify the cultural and educational foundations of the bilateral relationship, deepening mutual respect and collaboration in non-governmental sectors [60].

In conclusion, Vietnam's relationship with South Korea in the post-COVID-19 era is characterized by strengthened cooperation across economic, health, strategic, and cultural domains. Both countries have adapted to the new realities brought on by the pandemic and are poised to leverage their complementary strengths in emerging sectors such as digital transformation and renewable energy. South Korea's strategic significance to Vietnam continues to grow, particularly in the context of regional security and economic recovery. The Bamboo Diplomacy strategy allows Vietnam to navigate its relationship with South Korea flexibly and strategically, ensuring that its foreign policy remains responsive to the shifting dynamics of the Indo-Pacific. This partnership will play a key role in shaping the broader geopolitical and economic landscape of the region in the years to come.

4. Discussion

In the post-COVID-19 context, the world is experiencing profound shifts in economic, political, and social dynamics, particularly with regard to the uneven recovery between developed and developing countries. The pandemic exposed vulnerabilities in global supply chains, disrupted international trade, and altered the strategic priorities of nations worldwide. Developed countries, such as the United States and European nations, have rebounded quickly due to large stimulus packages and widespread vaccination efforts, while developing countries, including Vietnam, have faced more challenges in securing vaccines and financial resources. Vietnam's recovery has been relatively swift compared to other regional economies; yet, it

continues to face significant challenges in maintaining sustainable growth amidst these rapidly evolving global dynamics [61].

In this environment, Vietnam's foreign policy strategy, Bamboo Diplomacy, has been pivotal in maintaining stability in its relations with major powers like the United States, China, Russia, and South Korea. The strategy emphasizes flexibility and resilience, allowing Vietnam to protect its national interests while fostering deeper cooperation across various sectors. The relationship with South Korea, in particular, has grown into a central element in Vietnam's post-pandemic recovery, with collaboration in trade, technology, and renewable energy standing out as key areas of mutual benefit.

China remains a critical partner for Vietnam, especially in terms of economic cooperation, but the ongoing tensions in the South China Sea present a significant challenge. Vietnam's approach to China has been one of careful balancing—engaging in economic collaboration while firmly defending its territorial sovereignty. This approach allows Vietnam to benefit from China's economic growth and investment, especially through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), but also ensures that Vietnam's position on key security issues, such as the South China Sea, is clearly articulated. The need for a balanced relationship with China is essential for Vietnam's continued development, even as it remains vigilant about its national security concerns [62, 63].

In parallel, Vietnam's relationship with the United States has strengthened significantly, particularly in the fields of trade, public health, and defense. The U.S. has been a critical partner in providing assistance during the pandemic, including vaccine distribution and medical supplies. Economic ties have flourished, with increasing American investments in Vietnam's technology and manufacturing sectors. However, challenges such as human rights concerns and political differences still persist, requiring Vietnam to maintain a nuanced approach in managing its relations with the U.S. While these tensions exist, the broader cooperation in areas like defense, regional security, and technology remains vital to both countries' strategic interests [6, 10, 64].

Russia also plays a significant role in Vietnam's post-pandemic strategy, particularly in defense and energy cooperation. Historically, Russia has been a reliable partner for Vietnam in providing military technology and expertise. This relationship remains strong, with continued cooperation in defense modernization, joint military exercises, and the transfer of military technologies. Beyond defense, Russia's role in the energy sector, particularly in oil and gas exploration in the South China Sea, continues to be crucial for Vietnam's energy security [65]. The ongoing geopolitical challenges, including Russia's strained relations with the West, provide an opportunity for Vietnam to deepen its partnership with Russia as a counterbalance to the influence of other major powers in the region. However, the economic challenges that Russia faces, particularly due to international sanctions, mean that this relationship requires careful management to avoid economic dependencies that could limit Vietnam's autonomy in foreign policy [66].

Domestically, Vietnam faces a range of challenges as it seeks to maintain its rapid economic growth and development. The pandemic has highlighted significant gaps in the country's healthcare infrastructure, social welfare systems, and economic inequality. As Vietnam shifts toward a more digital economy, technological innovation, and green energy initiatives, addressing these domestic challenges will be crucial to ensuring long-term stability and sustainable growth. The post-pandemic world demands that Vietnam accelerate its digital transformation, build a more robust social safety net, and continue to invest in education and workforce development to ensure that all citizens benefit from the country's economic successes [12, 67].

The approach posits that the interplay between economic and political factors explicitly and rigorously determines Vietnam's cooperation policy with China. Vietnam employs a flexible and well-balanced approach to bolster economic cooperation and uphold regional stability by actively fostering political collaboration. Regarding the United States, Vietnam's policy seeks to enhance and advance comprehensive collaboration across various domains, particularly emphasizing high-tech cooperation. The United States, as a comprehensive strategic partner, shares numerous commonalities with Vietnam in terms of its vision for strategic interests in the region and the world. Additionally, the two countries hold many consensus views on various aspects of bilateral cooperation. Vietnam demonstrates its cooperative stance with Russia by prioritizing defense, security, and energy sectors, aligning with Russia's expertise. Both parties are mutually dependent on this all-encompassing strategic alliance. In order to establish a robust standing both regionally and globally, Vietnam must leverage its defense, security, and energy capabilities. On the contrary, Russia relies on Vietnam to serve as a conduit facilitating its access to the ASEAN region. The development of diplomatic relations between Vietnam and South Korea can be attributed to the practical and increasingly collaborative efforts in the economic domain. Consequently, establishing novel economic mechanisms within the bilateral relationship between the two nations will engender numerous additional collaboration domains during the post-pandemic era.

The proverb "A friend in need is a friend indeed" highlights the difficulty in discerning the true nature of a good friend. The veracity and validity of this statement have been substantiated and confirmed amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. While Vietnam has yet to achieve the highest level of diplomatic relations with specific partners, it is noteworthy that many of these partners have demonstrated their commitment to supporting Vietnam without expecting any reciprocal benefits. The countries in question are the United States of America and the Republic of Korea. The United States and South Korea have successfully established a foundation of strategic trust in Vietnam amidst the significant challenges posed by the ongoing pandemic. In the post-pandemic period, it is imperative for Vietnam to make a strategic decision to elevate its relations with South Korea and the United States to a level commensurate with its existing comprehensive strategic partnerships with China and Russia.

Vietnam's diplomatic advancements with significant partners have emerged as a potent catalyst, bolstering support across various domains and fortifying its standing in international relations. The article examines Vietnam's strategic partners, which play a comprehensive role in the country's development. Consequently, it proves challenging to precisely discern the individual contributions of these entities to Vietnam's overall progress. Nevertheless, an analysis of the respective positions

and levels of influence held by Vietnam, China, and the United States reveals that the interplay between these nations will ultimately determine Vietnam's impact within the broader global context. Simultaneously, establishing diplomatic ties with Russia and South Korea will enable Vietnam to cultivate significant regional influence. Vietnam's foreign policy, which is adjusting to the post-COVID-19 context, demonstrates the enduring strength and traditional essence of its "bamboo foreign policy" approach.

5. Conclusion

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, Vietnam finds itself at a critical juncture in its development trajectory. The global landscape has undergone significant transformations, with both challenges and opportunities emerging in the economic, political, and security domains. Vietnam's response to these changes has been shaped by its flexible yet firm approach to foreign policy, exemplified by the strategy of Bamboo Diplomacy, which allows the country to maintain strategic autonomy while engaging with major global powers such as the United States, China, Russia, and South Korea.

On the economic front, Vietnam's rapid recovery stands in contrast to the slower recovery of many countries in Southeast Asia. The nation's strong manufacturing sector, especially in electronics and textiles, has driven its economic resurgence. However, challenges persist, particularly in addressing the trade imbalances, technological dependencies, and economic vulnerabilities exposed during the pandemic. The partnerships with global powers like the U.S., China, and South Korea, along with Vietnam's increased participation in multilateral frameworks like ASEAN, will be instrumental in navigating the post-pandemic economic landscape. These partnerships open opportunities for Vietnam to diversify its trade, advance its technological capabilities, and foster sustainable development through collaborations in renewable energy and digital transformation.

Geopolitically, Vietnam's position in the Indo-Pacific remains crucial. The competition between China and the United States continues to define the region's strategic landscape, and Vietnam has managed to walk a fine line, engaging with both powers while prioritizing its national interests, particularly concerning the South China Sea and sovereignty issues. The Bamboo Diplomacy strategy has enabled Vietnam to strengthen its relationships with key regional players like South Korea while maintaining a pragmatic approach to its interactions with China and the U.S. This careful balancing act positions Vietnam as a key player in shaping the future of the region, ensuring both its security and economic resilience.

In conclusion, Vietnam's strategic positioning in the post-COVID-19 world reflects its adaptability and foresight in foreign policy, economic recovery, and national development. The flexible and resilient approach defined by Bamboo Diplomacy allows Vietnam to remain a key player in the Indo-Pacific region while safeguarding its sovereignty and long-term interests. Moving forward, Vietnam's ability to navigate the complex dynamics between global powers, drive economic diversification, and address domestic challenges will determine its success in establishing a sustainable, prosperous future in a rapidly changing world. By building on the strong foundations of multilateral cooperation, technological innovation, and sustainable development, Vietnam is poised to emerge as a leader in the region, contributing to global peace, security, and prosperity.

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Appendices

Table 1.

Summary of Diplomatic, Economic, and Security Contributions of Key Global Partners to Vietnam.

Country	Diplomatic Contributions	Economic Contributions	Security & Defense Contributions
United States	- Provided healthcare and vaccine support during the COVID-19 pandemic [2]	- One of Vietnam's largest trade partners [4] - Major investments in electronics, textiles, and agriculture [10]	- Defense cooperation to enhance Vietnam's military capabilities - Support for Vietnam's stance on regional security, particularly freedom of navigation in the South China Sea [41]
China	- Deep diplomatic ties but with territorial disputes, especially in the South China Sea [13]	- Vietnam's largest trading partner, particularly in manufacturing and agriculture [3] - Significant investments in infrastructure and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) [30]	- Military cooperation on border security and sovereignty protection [14] - Tensions regarding South China Sea claims, but ongoing economic collaboration in security matters
Russia	- Long-term strategic partner in security and energy [16]	- Key energy partner, especially in oil and gas exploration [17]	- Supplier of military equipment, supporting Vietnam's defense modernization [15] - Participation in joint military exercises to strengthen Vietnam's defense capabilities

South Korea	- Strong diplomatic cooperation in economic and healthcare matters, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic [1]	- One of the largest foreign investors in Vietnam, particularly in technology and manufacturing [52] - Financial aid and development support [19]	- Defense cooperation on regional security, particularly addressing threats from North Korea [55] - Joint efforts to enhance regional security in ASEAN
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Economic Cooperation Metrics: Vietnam and Major Countries (U.S., China, Russia, South Korea)

Country	Trade Volume (Billion USD)	Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)	Key Sectors of Cooperation
United States	- Trade volume: \$90.8 billion (2023)	- FDI inflow: \$13.9 billion (2023)	- Electronics: Vietnam is a key manufacturing hub for U.S. tech companies. - Textiles & Apparel: Major exports to the U.S. market. - Agriculture: Exports like coffee, seafood, and rubber. - Defense & Security: Growing cooperation in regional security and defense.
China	- Trade volume: \$132.7 billion (2023)	- FDI inflow: \$2.7 billion (2023)	- Manufacturing & Textiles: A significant amount of raw materials and machinery is traded. - Agriculture: Vietnam exports seafood and agricultural products to China. - Infrastructure: China's Belt and Road Initiative investments, particularly in transportation and energy. - Technology: Investment in telecommunications and digital infrastructure.
Russia	- Trade volume: \$10.1 billion (2023)	- FDI inflow: \$0.4 billion (2023)	- Energy: Oil and gas exploration and energy projects. - Defense: Military technology and arms trade. - Agriculture: Rice exports from Vietnam to Russia. - Education & Research: Collaboration in nuclear energy and space technology.
South Korea	- Trade volume: \$78.4 billion (2023)	- FDI inflow: \$7.6 billion (2023)	- Electronics: South Korea is a major investor in Vietnam's electronics manufacturing. - Automotive: Hyundai, Kia, and other automotive brands have significant production in Vietnam. - Technology: Strong partnership in digital transformation, especially in 5G technology. - Construction & Infrastructure: South Korea invests in real estate and infrastructure development.