



India to Modernize Vietnam's Defense Forces

India and Vietnam announce defense agreements; disputes in the South China Sea should be resolved only by parties concerned, says China

Suhasini Haidar

India has committed to helping modernize Vietnam's security forces, after talks between the countries' prime ministers, Narendra Modi and Nguyen Tan Dung. The agreement gives India access to oil exploration in two blocks of the South China Sea and provides \$100 million line of credit to Vietnam for defense purchases, reports Suhasini Haidar for the Hindu. The two blocks allotted for Indian exploration are not under dispute with China. Rejecting neighboring countries' claims offshore sections of the South China Sea, as allowed by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, China insists no outside parties should be involved in settling the disputes. Vietnam has expressed an intention to purchase maritime patrol vessels, and Haidar concludes, "With the decision to step up supplying vessels and training the Vietnamese navy, Mr. Modi seems to be backing the tough words with conscious action." – YaleGlobal



Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung and Prime Minister Narendra Modi address a joint press conference after signing agreements on various fields for mutual cooperation in New Delhi on Tuesday. Photo: Rajeev Bhatt

Maritime dispute should be resolved only by parties concerned, says China

Calling India's defence cooperation with Vietnam "among our most important," Prime Minister Narendra Modi gave a commitment to "modernise Vietnam's defence and security forces" on Tuesday after talks with his counterpart Nguyen Tan Dung.

The two countries signed several agreements, including a memorandum of understanding for exploration by ONGC Videsh Limited in two blocks in the South China Sea. As *The Hindu* had reported on Monday, Mr. Modi also announced the operationalisation of the \$100 million line of credit for Vietnam's defence purchases.

Sources told *The Hindu* that Vietnam was keen to buy four off-shore patrol vehicles to start with.

This was especially significant as they would be deployed to police the South China Sea, areas of which were under dispute with China.

In a joint appearance before the media after their meeting, Mr. Nguyen said Vietnam "highly appreciated India's position regarding the East Sea [South China Sea] issue and India's continued cooperation with Vietnam in oil and gas exploration."

Responding to a question about Mr. Nguyen's earlier statement asking for "India's support" in resolving the South China Sea dispute, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hong Lei said on Tuesday that the dispute should only be resolved "by parties directly concerned."

In an indirect reference to India, Mr. Hong said, "Relevant countries should respect the efforts made by parties directly concerned to resolve disputes through negotiation and consultation and to uphold regional peace and stability." While neither of the two blocks signed for on Tuesday is in the disputed part, India's exploration has irked Beijing in the past. Mr. Hong said the India-Vietnam MoUs on oil explorations must not "undermine China's sovereignty and interests." Chinese State Counsellor Yang Jiechi has been in Hanoi for talks, even as Mr. Nguyen arrived in New Delhi.

Mr. Modi said Vietnam was at the "forefront" of India's efforts in the Asia Pacific region, which he said his government had "promptly and purposefully intensified" since coming to power. Mr. Modi's tough statement on the South China Sea comes after his statement in Japan in September that seemed to accuse China of "expansionist policies", and the joint statement during his visit to the U.S. called for "safeguarding maritime security in the South China Sea."

With the decision to step up supplying vessels and training the Vietnamese navy, Mr. Modi seems to be backing the tough words with conscious action. A source said the Vietnamese government now "will be free to place orders with either government or private Indian vendors."

(With additional reporting by Dinakar Peri)