

# PERSPECTIVE

RESEARCHERS AT ISEAS – YUSOF ISHAK INSTITUTE ANALYSE CURRENT EVENTS

**Singapore** | 4 May 2021

---

## **Vietnam and the Great Powers: Agency Amid Amity and Enmity**

*William Choong\**



Vietnam's favoured choice of "not taking sides" between China and the US has been portrayed as a decision not to choose a certain outcome, yet retaining the freedom to manoeuvre amid complexity and multipolarity. In this picture, Vietnam's Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc addresses counterparts at the ASEAN-US summit of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), on a live video conference held online due to the Covid-19 coronavirus pandemic, in Hanoi on November 14, 2020. Photo: Nhac NGUYEN, AFP.

*\* William Choong is Senior Fellow at the ISEAS -Yusof Ishak Institute, and the Managing Editor of Fulcrum, the Institute's commentary and analysis website.*

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- Vietnam's domestic and foreign policy structures held up well in 2020 in the face of significant challenges involving Covid-19, chairing ASEAN, and relations with China and the United States.
- At home, it managed the Covid-19 pandemic commendably and kept economic growth going at a steady clip. As ASEAN chair, it steered the grouping through a difficult year of the pandemic and great power rivalry.
- Externally, Vietnam continued to maintain a delicate balance between China and the US, while at the same time retaining a strategic option to pursue deeper defence and military relations with the US.
- Vietnam's ability to maintain and enhance agency, in particular in its relations with Beijing, offers lessons for other Southeast Asian countries facing the same dilemma.

## **INTRODUCTION**

As Sino-US rivalry escalated in recent years, the mantra of “not choosing sides” between China and the United States (US) has become the favoured choice for many states in Southeast Asia. The same applies to Vietnam, a frontline state in the dispute with China over the South China Sea. In 2020, Vietnam faced a slew of challenges, ranging from the Covid-19 pandemic, managing Chinese power, disputes in the South China Sea and maintaining ASEAN cohesion as chair of the 10-member organisation.

Remarkably, Vietnam held up well. At home, it managed the Covid-19 pandemic commendably and kept economic growth going at a steady clip. As ASEAN chairman, it steered the grouping through a difficult year of the pandemic and great power rivalry. Externally, Vietnam continued to maintain a delicate balance between China and the US, while at the same time retaining a strategic option to pursue deeper defence and military relations with the US.

Vietnam also subscribes to not choosing sides between China and the US, but for Hanoi, the level of complexity is higher. The Sino-Vietnam relationship is troubled by historical baggage and the dispute over the South China Sea. The same complexity applies to Hanoi’s relationship with the US. While bilateral relations have progressed substantially in recent years, a vestigial mistrust of Washington, in particular of the latter’s rhetoric on human rights and democracy, continues. Yet, Vietnam still provides a model for how Southeast Asian countries can respond to China in a time of great geopolitical flux.

If agency in this context is defined as the ability to maximise benefits from both powers while adopting hedging strategies to keep them at arm’s length, Vietnam is a classic showcase of that art, which can be useful for other Southeast Asian nations to replicate.

## **FIERCE STREAK OF INDEPENDENCE**

Vietnam is no strategic lightweight among ASEAN’s 10-member states. In 2020, it overtook Singapore and Malaysia to be the grouping’s fourth largest economy (after Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines),<sup>1</sup> ranked fourth in defence spending in 2020 (at US\$5.7 billion) and boasts the region’s largest active standing military, at 482,000 in personnel size.<sup>2</sup> That said, Vietnam lives in a tough neighbourhood. Historically, the natural geographical separation of its northern and southern cores exacerbated the two regions’ political and social divide, leaving the country vulnerable to invasion by foreign powers – Chinese, French or American.<sup>3</sup> In particular, Vietnam has always been exposed to China’s expansionary tendencies and what one analyst terms the “tyranny of geography” – an old joke puts that the country’s S-shaped bend resembles an “old woman straining under China’s weight”.<sup>4</sup> Yet, Vietnam has always retained a fierce streak of independence, repelling repeated Chinese invasions throughout history. Significantly, between 1954 and 1979, Vietnam defeated three big powers – the French (by the Viet Minh), the Americans and the Chinese.



Vietnam has always maintained a fierce streak of independence. In this picture, two Viet Cong and a North Vietnamese Army officer with still and motion picture cameras that they will use to photograph the exchange of prisoners of war. Picture: The US National Archives.

The determination to safeguard Vietnam’s independence through policy flexibility and effective execution continues to this day. This implacable streak of independence is reflected in comments by Ho Chi Minh. In the 1950 and 1960s, when the Sino-Vietnam relationship was termed as close as “lips and teeth”, Ho Chi Minh described the relationship as being “one hundred favours, a thousand loyal affections and ten thousand loves”. Yet when Chinese (Nationalist) forces arrived in northern Vietnam in 1945, Ho said he would rather put up with French rule than endure another Chinese occupation. He reportedly said: “I prefer to sniff French s\*\*\* for five years than eat Chinese s\*\*\* for the rest of my life.”<sup>5</sup>

## MANAGING EXTERNAL RELATIONS

As the Indonesian dictum goes, national resilience breeds regional resilience, and regional resilience enhances national resilience. Vietnam’s ability to keep the number of Covid-19 cases low augurs well for the country.<sup>6</sup> Its successful management of the pandemic has had knock-on effects on its economy. It has been reported as likely to have been Asia’s top-performing economy in 2020 – a feat achieved without a single quarter of contraction.<sup>7</sup> Vietnam reported 2020 GDP growth at 2.9 per cent, thanks to robust exports of electronics and other consumer products.<sup>8</sup> In recent decades, GDP growth averaged 7 per cent, thus doubling GDP to US\$262 billion in the decade ending 2019.<sup>9</sup> Vietnam was already benefiting from the Sino-US trade war, as China-based foreign firms moved to the country.

Since 1986, when Vietnam embarked on its *doi moi* policy, four themes have shaped its diplomacy: diversification and multilateralisation of external relations; defending the national

interest through cooperation and struggle; active international integration, and; the maintenance of independence, sovereignty and strategic autonomy.<sup>10</sup> Through the three decades from 1986 and 2016,<sup>11</sup> one way Hanoi did this was by sustaining “strategic” and “comprehensive” partnerships with middle powers, such as Australia, India, Japan and South Korea – a move that Beijing tends to be less sensitive to compared to Hanoi’s relations with the US.<sup>12</sup> Despite the growing number of such relationships, Vietnam remains non-aligned and stays clear of formal alliances, in part to avoid provoking Beijing.<sup>13</sup> Like other Southeast Asian states, Vietnam has sought to avoid making stark choices between China and the US – and enjoying the “blessedness of not making choices.”<sup>14</sup>

In recent years, Vietnam has seen significant upgrades in its relationships with other powers. In 2014, the Japan-Vietnam relationship was upgraded from a “strategic partnership” to an “extensive strategic partnership”. In 2016, the India-Vietnam relationship was upgraded from a “strategic partnership” to a “comprehensive strategic partnership”.<sup>15</sup> In November 2020, Australia expressed a desire for bilateral ties with Vietnam to be upgraded from a strategic partnership to a “comprehensive strategic partnership”.<sup>16</sup> It is worth noting that Australia, Japan and India are part of the Quadrilateral Security Grouping, or “Quad” together with the US. This is an informal grouping of democracies seeking to uphold a regional, rules-based order premised on principles such as freedom of navigation, free and open societies and the importance of international law.

The biggest challenge for Vietnam, however, remains the triangle involving itself, China and the US. Thus far, Vietnam has been able to maintain a delicate balance in the triangle. With China, the relationship is multi-faceted. Vietnam’s economy has become increasingly interlinked with China, and the two countries’ Marxist-Leninist political systems are similar. Beijing also has the rare accolade of being the only country which is a “comprehensive strategic cooperative partner” of Vietnam.<sup>17</sup> Still, historical animosity to Chinese domination and the lingering dispute with China over the South China Sea has constrained the China-Vietnam relationship. In the eyes of a senior Vietnamese diplomat, Vietnam’s most serious problems lie with China, given Beijing’s attempt to gain control of the South China Sea, its growing strength and its “more aggressive” behaviour.<sup>18</sup> As such, Vietnam’s sophisticated management of the bilateral relationship cautiously avoids provoking of Beijing.<sup>19</sup> Hanoi’s highest foreign policy priority is to insulate the two countries’ economic (and overall) relationship from the dispute, while at the same time building as many security ties with as many powers as possible.<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, the Vietnam-US relationship has also developed apace. Relations between the two erstwhile enemies have come a long way since diplomatic normalisation in 1995, such that they are reportedly considering upgrading their “comprehensive relationship” to a “strategic partnership”.<sup>21</sup> The relationship has been buoyed by a shared perception of the China threat, and coincides with Vietnam’s generally supportive view of US-led regional and global orders, such as the Trump administration’s “free and open Indo-Pacific” (FOIP) strategy.<sup>22</sup> In 2018, Vietnam participated for the first time in the US-led Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) exercise, the world’s biggest multilateral naval exercise; the US has also provided the Vietnamese Coast Guard with patrol boats and training facilities.<sup>23</sup> Two US Navy Nimitz-class carriers visited Vietnam in 2018 and 2020 – marking a historic advance in the relationship. However, the relationship is also constrained by multiple factors – Vietnam officials’ suspicions about Washington’s long-term goal of “peaceful evolution” to depose the Vietnamese Communist Party; American concerns about Hanoi’s human rights record, and more importantly, the implications of an improved bilateral relationship on China.<sup>24</sup>

## AGENCY IN THE MIDST OF ENMITY

In the face of China's growing assertiveness, Vietnam has demonstrated much agency by employing several avenues: contributing to regional and global security; internationalising the South China Sea issue, threatening legal action against Beijing; and participating in regional mechanisms such as the Quad to counteract Chinese assertiveness.

### *Contributing to Regional Peace and Security*

Since the late 1980s, Vietnam has maintained the principle that it will be a “friend and reliable partner of all countries”, such that it will actively participate in “international and regional cooperation processes.”<sup>25</sup> In 2020, Vietnam enjoyed a successful year as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). It also served as the president of the UNSC, which conducted an open debate on upholding the UN Charter. The debate saw a record 111 speakers from 106 states, and the adoption of the first UNSC President statement calling for compliance to the Charter.<sup>26</sup> Hanoi is also planning to expand its UN peacekeeping operations, which has helped promote cooperation between Vietnam and its partners, and enhanced its position in the regional and global arena. Between June 2014 and December 2020, Vietnam sent 179 officers and soldiers to peacekeeping missions in South Sudan, the Central Africa Republic and the UN Peace Operation Department at UN Headquarters.<sup>27</sup>

Vietnam was chosen as the venue for the second Trump-Kim summit in 2019 for various reasons, such as its relatively close relations with the three involved powers in the Korean nuclear issue (the US, North Korea and South Korea) and Vietnam's relative proximity to North Korea. By far, however, the most important benefit for Hanoi was the chance to showcase its diplomatic skill of handling such a crucial event on a global stage.<sup>28</sup> The same applied to Hanoi's successful hosting of the 2017 Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting. The meeting demonstrated its diplomatic finesse at balancing between China and the United States. During the meeting, Vietnam issued two important joint statements. The one with Washington affirmed their Comprehensive Partnership and sought to promote trade and investment and deepen security cooperation. In its joint statement with China, Vietnam welcomed and supported China's Belt and Road Initiative. Both sides agreed to enhance cooperation on economy and trade, industrial capacity, investment and infrastructure.<sup>29</sup>

### *Internationalising the South China Sea Issue*

Vietnam has displayed ingenuity and boldness in championing its interests on the South China Sea issue each time it played the role of ASEAN chair. In 2010, when Vietnam was ASEAN chair, then-US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton – reportedly with Vietnamese instigation – stressed at an ASEAN security forum in Hanoi that the US had an interest in freedom of navigation in the disputed South China Sea. This helped to internationalise the issue, and understandably riled China.<sup>30</sup>

In 2020, Vietnam, as ASEAN chair again, strengthened the group's discourse on the South China Sea issue, focusing on the primacy of international law. Its chairman's statement at the 36<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Summit in June 2020 affirmed UNCLOS as the basis for “determining maritime entitlements, sovereign rights, jurisdiction and legitimate interests over maritime zones”. The same statement had six mentions of “UNCLOS” – three times more than the 35<sup>th</sup> ASEAN

Summit's chairman's statement. Vietnam's chairman's statement had five mentions of "international law" compared to three in the 2019 chairman's statement.<sup>31</sup> Using its prerogative as ASEAN chair, Vietnam used similar language in chairman statements of ASEAN's ministerial meetings with Canada, Japan, New Zealand, the US and the European Union.<sup>32</sup> Again, this helped to internationalise the issue, by striking resonance with countries that place an emphasis on the value of international law in the controversial dispute. Intriguingly, Vietnam's use of strong language saw no adverse public reaction from China.

### *Detering China and the Threat of Legal Action*

Vietnam has become quite adroit at sending deterrent messages to Beijing not to cross redlines in its interactions with its smaller neighbour. In the 2014 oil-rig standoff between China and Vietnam in the Paracels, China withdrew the rig after about two months. Vietnam's successful defence of its interests was due to a slew of factors,<sup>33</sup> including Hanoi's threat of legal action against Beijing. While on a visit to Manila, Vietnam's then-prime minister Nguyen Tan Dung said that Hanoi was considering "various defense options". This would include legal actions in accordance with international law to defend its South China Sea claims.<sup>34</sup> At the 2014 Shangri-La Dialogue, then-defence minister Phung Quang Thanh said that Hanoi was prepared for "other solutions", including taking China to court. The minister said that the solutions must be "peaceful" should bilateral means fail.<sup>35</sup> While Beijing stressed that the withdrawal had "nothing to do with any external factor". Vietnamese leaders hailed the retreat as a victory.<sup>36</sup> The incident has been called the "clearest case of major coercive failure" for China.<sup>37</sup>

In 2019, the two countries were embroiled in another standoff near Vanguard Bank in the South China Sea. China took tougher action to disrupt Vietnam's new oil and gas mining operations, but Vietnam showed no signs of backing down. At the 52<sup>nd</sup> ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting (AMM) in 2019, Vietnam secured, in an AMM Joint Communique, tougher language in an indirect reference to Chinese actions.<sup>38</sup> It also secured support from extra-regional parties such as Australia, the European Union and the US. While there was no official declaration that Hanoi would consider taking China to arbitration, there have been suggestions for Vietnam to take the dispute to an arbitral tribunal – the same approach taken by The Philippines against China in 2013.<sup>39</sup>

### *Extra-regional Dialogue Mechanisms*

The ace in the deck which exemplifies Vietnam's agency is the refining of its defence posture in its 2019 defence white paper. Traditionally, this posture has been premised on "three no's" – that is, no military alliances, no alignment with one country against another, and no using of Vietnam's territory to carry out military activities against another country. The 2019 paper introduced a new "no" (no use or threat of force) and a "depend" - that Vietnam will consider developing "necessary, appropriate defence and military relations with other countries" in the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>40</sup> The new language is indicative of Vietnam's increasing receptiveness of the US-led FOIP strategy, in particular, the emphasis on freedom of navigation and the upholding of international law, particularly as applied to China's nine-dashed line claim in the South China Sea.

In addition, by using the "Indo-Pacific" term, Hanoi is suggesting that it might contemplate, as a last resort, an upgrade in relations with the US and potentially other countries in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>41</sup> In effect, this serves as a deterrent signal to China as it affords Vietnam room to step

up its ties with not only individual members of the Quad but also with the four-nation grouping as a whole. Most recently, Vietnam participated in a Quad-Plus meeting involving the four members of the Quad, New Zealand and South Korea. Although the 2020 meeting discussed joint responses to the common scourge of Covid-19, the message would not be lost on China that Hanoi might consider cooperating with the Quad on defence and military-related topics should it feel a need to do so.

Lending credibility to the desire of other like-minded partners to exercise agency, Mike Pompeo, the former US Secretary of State, welcomed the institutionalisation of the Quad and for other countries to be part of this arrangement at some future point. The Biden administration appears to have placed equal, if not more emphasis on this front with its hosting of the first Quad Summit in March 2021. Furthermore, in its interim national security strategic guidance issued in the same month, the administration said it was open to working with “Vietnam, and other Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states” to advance shared objectives.<sup>42</sup> *In toto*, this gives Hanoi more leverage in its pursuit of options vis-à-vis China.

## CONCLUSION

Vietnam has pursued both diplomatic and defensive options to pre-empt further pressure from Beijing. It has taken part in three major multilateral trade agreements of note – the 11-member Comprehensive and Progressive Partnership for Trans-Pacific Partnership, the 15-nation Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, and the European Union-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement. Such FTAs internationalise Vietnam’s economy and reduce its reliance on any particular country. In the South China Sea, Vietnam is making “modest improvements” to the features it occupies in the Spratlys, including anti-air and coastal defences on Vietnam-occupied features such as Spratly Island, Pearson Reef and Sand Cay.<sup>43</sup> This in itself suggests Vietnam’s development of an anti-access, area denial strategy (A2AD) that replicates China’s own A2AD strategy in the area.<sup>44</sup> This would serve to blunt, but not eradicate, Chinese advantages if conflict arises in the area.

Vietnam’s favoured choice of “not taking sides” between China and the US has been portrayed as a decision not to choose a certain outcome, yet retaining the freedom to manoeuvre amid complexity and multipolarity. This involves a country knowing its own interests, taking a position accordingly so as not to allow others to define its national interests.<sup>45</sup> As David Shambaugh argues, ASEAN states still retain agency and can mitigate the region’s tilt towards China, based on America’s strategic weight in the region, Chinese diplomatic missteps and the help of other middle powers.<sup>46</sup> As Vietnam has shown, they can still navigate and waltz among the duelling pachyderms if they employ some creative thinking.

---

<sup>1</sup> Statista, “Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the ASEAN Countries from 2010 to 2020”, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/796245/gdp-of-the-asean-countries/>

<sup>2</sup> International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance*, (Abingdon: Routledge for the IISS, 2021), pp 518-519

<sup>3</sup> Stratfor, “Vietnam’s Geographic Challenge”, 18 September 2014, <https://worldview.stratfor.com/region/asia-pacific/vietnam>

- <sup>4</sup> Sebastian Strangio, *In the Dragon's Shadow: Southeast Asia in the Chinese Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2020), pp 90-91
- <sup>5</sup> Strangio, *In the Dragon's Shadow*, p. 97
- <sup>6</sup> Nguyen Guy, "Vietnam Exits Top 10 in Resilience Ranking Due to New Outbreak," VN Express, 2 March 2021, <https://e.vnexpress.net/news/news/vietnam-exits-top-10-in-covid-19-resilience-ranking-due-to-new-outbreak-4241777.html>
- <sup>7</sup> Yen Nee Lee, "This is Asia's Top-Performing Economy in the Covid Pandemic - It's Not China," CNBC, 27 January 2021, <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/01/28/vietnam-is-asias-top-performing-economy-in-2020-amid-covid-pandemic.html>
- <sup>8</sup> Kentaro Iwamoto, "ASEAN's 2021 GDP Forecasts Show Cautious Optimism in COVID Shadow", *Nikkei Asia*, 15 February 2021, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Economy/ASEAN-s-2021-GDP-forecasts-show-cautious-optimism-in-COVID-shadow>
- <sup>9</sup> Huong Le Thu, "Vietnam's Coming Leadership Change", *The Diplomat*, 1 January 2021, <https://magazine.thediplomat.com/#/issues/-MP3bG9zf0K8NVsEkcVl/preview/-MP3bGyD6VDM7gKWxETv>
- <sup>10</sup> Thayer, "The Evolution of Vietnamese Diplomacy" p. 40
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 23
- <sup>12</sup> Le Hong Hiep, "Vietnam's Strategic Trajectory", *ASPI Strategic Insights*, June 2021, <https://www.openbriefing.org/docs/vietnamtrajectory.pdf>, p. 11
- <sup>13</sup> Tim Huxley and William Choong (eds), "Vietnam's Major Power Diplomacy", *Asia-Pacific Regional Security Assessment 2016* (London: the International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2016), p. 75
- <sup>14</sup> William Choong, "China-US Relations: Singapore's Elusive Sweet Spot", *ISEAS Perspective No. 80*, 23 July 2020, [https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/ISEAS\\_Perspective\\_2020\\_80.pdf](https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/ISEAS_Perspective_2020_80.pdf), pp 5-6
- <sup>15</sup> Devirupa Mitra, "India and Vietnam Upgrade to Comprehensive Strategic Partnership", *The Wire*, 4 September 2016, <https://thewire.in/external-affairs/india-and-vietnam-upgrade-to-comprehensive-strategic-partnership>. Vo Xuan Vinh, "India-Vietnam Relations Under Modi 2.0: Prospects and Challenges", *ISEAS Perspective 2019 No. 82*, [https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/ISEAS\\_Perspective\\_2019\\_82.pdf](https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/ISEAS_Perspective_2019_82.pdf), p.2
- <sup>16</sup> Vietnam News Agency, "Australia Wants to Set Up Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with Vietnam: FM", 5 November 2020, <https://en.vietnamplus.vn/australia-wants-to-set-up-comprehensive-strategic-partnership-with-vietnam-fm/189882.vnp>
- <sup>17</sup> Derek Grossman, "Reviewing Vietnam's 'Struggle' Options in the South China Sea", *The RAND Blog*, 4 May 2020, <https://www.rand.org/blog/2020/05/reviewing-vietnams-struggle-options-in-the-south-china.html>
- <sup>18</sup> David Shambaugh, *Where Great Powers Meet: America & China in Southeast Asia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), p. 95, 210
- <sup>19</sup> ibid
- <sup>20</sup> Strangio, *In the Dragon's Shadow*, pp 106-107
- <sup>21</sup> Le Hong Hiep, "The Vietnam-US Partnership and the Rules-Based International Order in the Age of Trump", *Trends in Southeast Asia*, 2020, p. 1, 20-21, [https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/TRS1\\_20.pdf](https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/TRS1_20.pdf)
- <sup>22</sup> ibid, p 2, 27
- <sup>23</sup> Maria Siow, "US-Vietnam Defence Ties Expected to Strengthen with New Governments in Place and China Looming: Analyst", *South China Morning Post*, 30 January 2021, <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3119865/us-vietnam-defence-ties-expected-strengthen-new-governments>
- <sup>24</sup> Congressional Research Service, "US-Vietnam Relations", 16 February 2021, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/IF10209.pdf>

- <sup>25</sup> Viet Phuong Nguyen, “Why Vietnam Should Host the Second Trump-Kim Summit”, *The Diplomat*, 16 January 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/01/why-vietnam-should-host-the-second-trump-kim-summit/>
- <sup>26</sup> Huong Le Thu, “Vietnam Steps Up to Take Vietnam Leadership Role”, *ASPI Strategist*, 5 August 2020, <https://vietnamnet.vn/en/politics/vietnam-gains-breakthrough-diplomatic-success-as-unsc-member-official-708187.html>
- <sup>27</sup> Nhan Dan, “Vietnam Expects to Expand Engagement in UN Peacekeeping Operations”, 7 January 2021, <https://en.nhandan.org.vn/politics/item/9477902-vietnam-expects-to-expand-engagement-in-un-peacekeeping-operations.html>
- <sup>28</sup> Straits Times, “Trump-Kim Summit: Why is Vietnam Chosen?” 12 February 2019, <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/trump-kim-summit-why-was-vietnam-chosen>
- <sup>29</sup> Nguyen, “Why Vietnam Should Host the Second Trump-Kim Summit”
- <sup>30</sup> William Choong, “Coping with China’s Rapid Rise”, *The Straits Times*, 2 September 2011, p. A37
- <sup>31</sup> See ASEAN, “Chairman’s Statement of the 36<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Summit”, 26 June 2020, <https://asean.org/storage/2020/06/Chairman-Statement-of-the-36th-ASEAN-Summit-FINAL.pdf>, ASEAN “Chairman’s Statement of the 35<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Summit”, 3 November 2019, <https://asean.org/storage/2019/11/Chairs-Statement-of-the-35th-ASEAN-Summit-FINAL.pdf>
- <sup>32</sup> Hoang Thi Ha, “ASEAN and the South China Sea Code of Conduct: Raising the Aegis of International Law”, *ISEAS Commentaries*, 21 September 2020, <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/media/commentaries/asean-and-the-south-china-sea-code-of-conduct-raising-the-aegis-of-international-law/>
- <sup>33</sup> Such as the US condemnation of the Chinese deployment; Vietnam’s deployment of dozens of ships around the Chinese oil-rig; and popular resistance among ordinary Vietnamese to China’s actions.
- <sup>34</sup> Reuters, “Vietnam PM Says Considering Legal Action Against China Over Disputed Waters”, 22 May 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-vietnam-china-idUSBREA4K1AK20140522>
- <sup>35</sup> Chua Chin Hon, “Vietnam Mulling Legal Option to Resolve Maritime Spat with China,” *The Straits Times*, 31 May 2014, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/vietnam-mulling-legal-option-to-resolve-maritime-spat-with-china>
- <sup>36</sup> Michael Green, Kathleen Hicks, Zack Cooper, John Schaus and Jake Douglas, “Counter-coercion Series: China-Vietnam Oil Rig Standoff,” *Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative*, 12 June 2017, <https://amti.csis.org/counter-co-oil-rig-standoff/>
- <sup>37</sup> *ibid*
- <sup>38</sup> Lye Liang Fook and Ha Hoang Hop, “The Vanguard Bank Incident: Developments and What Next?” *ISEAS Perspective*, 4 September 2019, p. 4, [https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/ISEAS\\_Perspective\\_2019\\_69.pdf](https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/ISEAS_Perspective_2019_69.pdf)
- <sup>39</sup> *ibid*
- <sup>40</sup> Ministry of Defence (Vietnam), “2019 Viet Nam National Defence”, <http://www.mod.gov.vn/wps/wcm/connect/08963129-c9cf-4c86-9b5c-81a9e2b14455/2019VietnamNationalDefence.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CACHEID=08963129-c9cf-4c86-9b5c-81a9e2b14455>, pp 23-24, 29
- <sup>41</sup> Derek Grossman, “What Does Vietnam Think About America’s Indo-Pacific Strategy?” *The RAND Blog*, 5 August 2020, <https://www.rand.org/blog/2020/08/what-does-vietnam-think-about-americas-indo-pacific.html>
- <sup>42</sup> Joseph R. Biden Jr., “Interim National Security Strategic Guidance”, March 2021, p. 10, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NSC-1v2.pdf>
- <sup>43</sup> Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, “Vietnam Shores up its Spratlys Defenses”, 19 February 2021, <https://amti.csis.org/vietnam-shores-up-its-spratly-defenses/>
- <sup>44</sup> S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, “Countering Anti-Access/ Areal Denial Challenges: Strategies and Capabilities (Event Report)”, 1 December 2017 [https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/ER180424\\_Countering-Anti-Access.pdf](https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/ER180424_Countering-Anti-Access.pdf), p. 10

<sup>45</sup> Bilahari Kausikan, “ASEAN’s Agency in the Midst of Great Power Competition”, *Australian Institute of International Affairs*, 30 October 2020, <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/aseans-agency-in-the-midst-of-great-power-competition/>

<sup>46</sup> Shambaugh, *Where Great Powers Meet*, pp 12-15

<p><b>ISEAS Perspective</b> is published electronically by: <b>ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute</b></p> <p>30 Heng Mui Keng Terrace Singapore 119614 Main Tel: (65) 6778 0955 Main Fax: (65) 6778 1735</p> <p>Get Involved with ISEAS. Please click here: <a href="https://www.iseas.edu.sg/support">https://www.iseas.edu.sg/support</a></p>	<p>ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute accepts no responsibility for facts presented and views expressed.</p> <p>Responsibility rests exclusively with the individual author or authors. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form without permission.</p> <p>© Copyright is held by the author or authors of each article.</p>	<p>Editorial Chairman: Choi Shing Kwok</p> <p>Editorial Advisor: Tan Chin Tiong</p> <p>Managing Editor: Ooi Kee Beng</p> <p>Editors: William Choong, Malcolm Cook, Lee Poh Onn, and Ng Kah Meng</p> <p>Comments are welcome and may be sent to the author(s).</p>
--	---	---