

# PERSPECTIVE

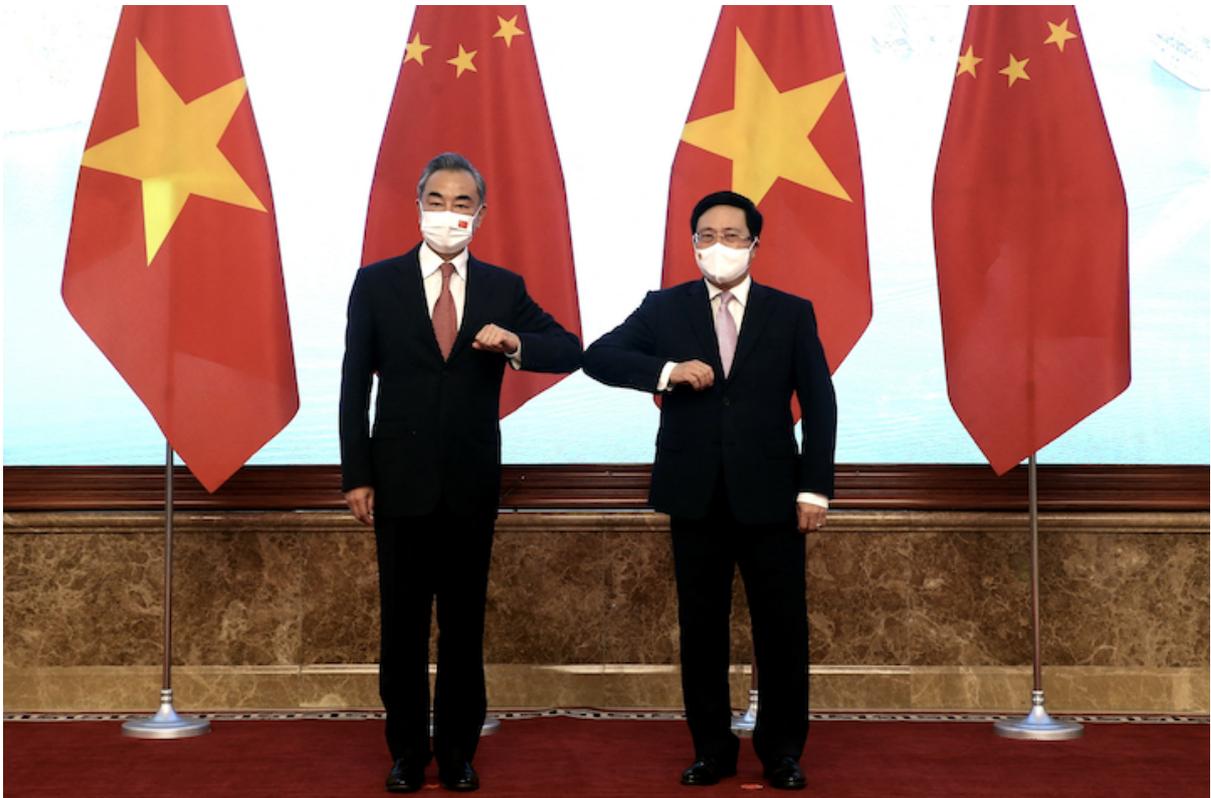
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## **Wang Yi's Visit to Vietnam: Reasserting Influence, Regaining Balance**

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This picture taken and released by the Vietnam News Agency on 10 September 2021 shows Vietnam's Deputy Prime minister Pham Binh Minh (R) bumping elbows to greet China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi (L) before a meeting in Hanoi. Photo: STR/Vietnam News Agency/AFP.

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi paid an official visit to Vietnam on 10-12 September as part of Beijing's efforts to reassert its influence on Vietnam and pull Hanoi back from its perceived 'tilt' towards Washington.
- Wang Yi emphasised the ideological affinity between the two countries, stepped up China's vaccine diplomacy, and warned Vietnam about external interferences in the South China Sea.
- Hosting Wang Yi provided Vietnam with an opportunity to address existing issues in bilateral relations and certain domestic concerns, especially to secure China's support for the Covid-19 response.
- Over the past year, bilateral ties seem to have enjoyed a rare respite from tensions in the South China Sea, and Wang Yi's visit could add to this renewed momentum in the improvement of bilateral relations.
- However, Vietnam-China relations are fundamentally constrained by strategic distrust over the South China Sea dispute. The intensifying China-US strategic competition is another challenge for Hanoi.
- While Hanoi continues to nurture ties with both China and the US, and insists not to take sides, it needs to also think forward and be prepared to make tough choices on relevant issues in the future.

## INTRODUCTION

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi paid an official visit to Vietnam on 10-12 September as part of his East Asia tour that also included stops in Singapore, Cambodia and the Republic of Korea. During his visit, he co-chaired the 13<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Steering Committee for Bilateral Cooperation with Vietnam's Deputy Prime Minister Pham Binh Minh, and met with Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong and Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh.

Wang Yi had paid official visits to all Southeast Asian states last year and early this year, except Vietnam.<sup>1</sup> Hanoi's absence in Chinese leaders' regional tours in the last two years was even more conspicuous given that Vietnam was the ASEAN Chair in 2020. During the same period, Hanoi hosted high-level visits by Japanese Prime Minister Suga and many cabinet members of the Trump administration.<sup>2</sup> Under Biden, the US continues to accord high priority to Vietnam in its Southeast Asia policy, as manifested in the Interim National Security Strategic Guidance,<sup>3</sup> and especially the two high-profile visits by Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin and Vice President Kamala Harris in July and August 2021, respectively.

Wang Yi's three-day visit to Hanoi, as compared to his shorter stops in Cambodia and Singapore, suggests Beijing's imperative to make its presence felt in Vietnam. Why so and why now? How did the US factor weigh in China's calculations towards Hanoi during this trip? This *Perspective* answers these questions by examining China's motivation and messaging during the visit. It also discusses Hanoi's statecraft in achieving its practical agenda from the visit while maintaining its balancing act between the great powers.

## CHINA'S MOTIVATION AND MESSAGE: REASSERTING INFLUENCE

*The Global Times* ran an op-ed on 12 September titled "Wang Yi's visit to neighbours expected to improve cooperation, not to counter US influence".<sup>4</sup> In fact, improving China's neighbourly relations and countering US influence should be mutually reinforcing from Beijing's perspective. Vietnam remains a key partner for China in Southeast Asia. Both countries are putatively ideological allies; and Vietnam is currently China's largest trading partner in ASEAN<sup>5</sup> and its sixth largest trading partner globally, with two-way trade turnover reaching US\$133.09 billion in 2020.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, as an immediate neighbour to China, Vietnam's defence policy and its positioning between China and America is critical to China's security.

The fact that Wang Yi's trip took place just two weeks after US Vice President Kamala Harris' visit to Hanoi suggests the imperative for China to reassert its influence on Vietnam in the wake of perceptions about Hanoi's 'tilt' towards Washington, which might have been amplified by high-level American visits. China's sense of urgency has heightened in the context of increasing US-China strategic competition under the Biden administration, and advances in Vietnam-US relations. Wang's priorities for his visit were: (i) Emphasising the ideological affinity; (ii) Stepping up vaccine diplomacy; and (iii) Warning on the South China Sea (SCS).

*Emphasising the ideological factor*

China defines its relations with Vietnam not only as “neighbouring states” but also as “comrades and brothers” anchored in ideological affinity and historical linkages. The Chinese leadership claims privilege in having a special conduit of leverage over Hanoi through party-to-party ties between the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the CPV. The CPC’s 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary and the CPV’s 13<sup>th</sup> National Congress this year provided a good context for Wang Yi’s emphasis on the two countries’ shared socialist ideology and political system during his visit. The news release of Wang Yi’s meeting with Pham Minh Chinh on the Chinese foreign ministry’s website said: “As both states are socialist countries led by the Communist Parties, reinforcing and revitalising socialist causes is the top priority in bilateral relations and the most significant and fundamental common strategic interests that both countries should insist on.”<sup>7</sup> The ideological tone was even more pronounced during Wang Yi’s meeting with party chief Nguyen Phu Trong: “China appreciates that General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong published a signed article after the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the CPV, emphasising the inevitability and correctness of Vietnam’s adherence to the socialist path, which is of great significance for Vietnam to overcome various risks and challenges.”<sup>8</sup>

However, ideology was not on top of the mind of Vietnamese leaders during their exchanges with Wang Yi, judging from what was reported in Vietnamese media. The coverage of Wang Yi’s meeting with Pham Minh Chinh on the Vietnamese government’s online portal highlighted bilateral issues ranging from Covid-19 response and border trade to the SCS disputes, but contained hardly any ideological element.<sup>9</sup> The news release on the CPV’s online portal about Wang Yi’s meeting with Nguyen Phu Trong was also much less ideologically laden than the Chinese version. Trong was quoted as emphasising the need to “enhance high-level bilateral exchanges to promote friendship and political trust, improve the effectiveness of party-to-party cooperation mechanisms, and exchange of experiences in Party building and country governance”.<sup>10</sup>

Some commentators have noted that Trong’s meeting with Wang Yi – and highlighting that he did not meet Kamala Harris – indicates Vietnam’s unequal treatment of Beijing and Washington.<sup>11</sup> That reading is overstretched, given the absence of party links between America and Vietnam. In 2018, Trong did meet then-Secretary of State Mike Pompeo when he visited Hanoi. With Washington’s repeated commitments to respect Vietnam’s political system and its pragmatic approach towards Hanoi, US-Vietnam bilateral ties are increasingly defined by their converging security and economic interests rather than by ideological considerations. While the US-China rivalry has taken on stronger ideological overtones, Vietnam-US relationship continues on its upward trend regardless of ideological differences, suggesting diverging trajectories of US-China and US-Vietnam relations in the years ahead.

*Stepping up vaccine diplomacy*

Southeast Asia is a primary target of China’s vaccine diplomacy, accounting for 29% of its total vaccine donations and over 25% of its vaccine sales worldwide by June 2021.<sup>12</sup> Despite being the first-mover in vaccine offerings to other Southeast Asian countries, China’s vaccine outreach towards Vietnam got a fairly late start. In June, China donated 700,000

Sinopharm doses to Vietnam, and in August pledged two million more free doses. Chinese Ambassador to Vietnam Xiong Bo made this pledge just one day before Kamala Harris' visit – a calibrated move to one-up the US, which donated one million Moderna doses during Harris' trip to Hanoi.<sup>13</sup> Vietnam is among the top recipients of US vaccine donations, with 6 million doses by end-August 2021.<sup>14</sup>

Until mid-2021, Hanoi had not been enthusiastic about approaching China for vaccine support due to the prevalent distrust of Chinese vaccines among the Vietnamese public and concerns about their relatively lower efficacy.<sup>15</sup> However, by the time of Wang Yi's visit, the Covid-19 situation had taken a tragic turn with massive spikes across Southern Vietnam, and the country was trying to secure any source of vaccine supply available. This provided a strategic window for China to extend its Covid-19 response support to Vietnam and play catch-up with Washington's vaccine diplomacy in the country.

During his visit, Wang Yi announced Beijing's donation of three more million doses to Vietnam. Three days later, China's Guangxi province offered 800,000 Sinopharm doses together with medical equipment and supplies. This brings China's total pledged vaccine donation to Vietnam to 6.5 million doses, exceeding that from the US. However, up to now, the Vietnamese government has not made any official deal to buy Chinese vaccines, except for the purchase of 13 million Sinopharm doses by a private company. The share of Chinese-made vaccines in Vietnam's vaccine portfolio remains modest in terms of both purchase and donation.

**Table 1: Vietnam's Covid-19 Vaccine Portfolio**

Vaccine Purchase			Vaccine Donation (COVAX and Bilateral Channels)		
Vaccine Brand	No. of Doses	Delivery	Donation Source	No. of Doses	Delivery
AstraZeneca	30 million	10.1 million	COVAX	38.9 million	12.5 million
Pfizer/BioNTech	31 million	1.77 million	US	6 million	6 million
Moderna	5 million	No delivery in 2021	Japan	3.58 million	3.58 million
Sputnik V	20 million		China Guangxi province	5.7 million 800,000	700,000
Sinopharm	13 million	13 million	Russia		12,000
Purchase agreements for Astra Zeneca, Pfizer/BioNTech, Moderna and Sputnik V were concluded by the Ministry of Health while Sinopharm vaccines were bought by a private-owned company.			UK		415,000
			Australia	1.5 million	403,000
			Poland		500,000
			Romania		300,000
			Czech Republic		250,000
			Belgium		100,000
			Slovakia		100,000
			Germany	2.5 million	

*Source: Compiled by author, based on public sources, as of 20 September 2021*

### *Warning on the South China Sea*

The sovereignty and maritime disputes in the SCS cast a long shadow on Vietnam-China relations, and there is little room for each party to moderate their respective positions and claims in order to reach a settlement. It is the single most important issue that drives Hanoi's estrangement from Beijing. According to the State of Southeast Asia Survey 2021 by ISEAS –Yusof Ishak Institute, among Southeast Asians, Vietnamese are the most apprehensive about Chinese actions and the most welcoming to increased military presence by the United States and other powers in the SCS.

The SCS has become a key theatre of the Indo-Pacific geopolitical contest, with higher density and frequency of all major powers' naval presence. Before and around the time of Wang Yi's visit, the UK's Carrier Strike Group-21 (CSG-21) had transited the SCS,<sup>16</sup> and the US' Carl Vinson Carrier Strike Group (VINCSG) was still undertaking freedom of navigation operations in the area.<sup>17</sup> The CSG-21 and VINCSG, together with four other task groups from the US, Australia, Japan and India, are currently on their operational deployments in the Indo-Pacific to participate in a series of multilateral exercises, sending a clear deterrent signal to China's maritime ambitions.<sup>18</sup> Notably, one of these task groups,

the Australian Defense Force Indo-Pacific Endeavour 21 (IPE 21) is currently at Vietnam’s Cam Ranh Bay for a four-day visit.<sup>19</sup>

Such a crowded maritime domain set the stage for Wang Yi to urge Vietnam to “be alert in resisting interference and incitement from regional outsiders”, “treasure the hard-won peace and stability in the SCS”, and “not to complicate the conditions or magnify conflicts from unilateral moves”. While this talking point is not new, there was added urgency and fervency to the tone. It was as much a warning to Vietnam as a swipe at Kamala Harris’ call on Vietnam to join Washington in opposing China’s “bullying”.<sup>20</sup>

**Table 2: Vietnamese Distrust of ‘Big Brother’ and Welcome to ‘Uncle Sam’ in the SCS**

Questions	Answers	Vietnam	ASEAN (average)
Top concerns about the SCS	China’s militarisation and assertive actions	76% - highest in ASEAN	59.1%
	China’s encroachments in the exclusive economic zones and continental shelves of other littoral states	84.6% - 2 <sup>nd</sup> highest, after The Philippines (86.6%)	62.4%
	The US’ increased military presence in the SCS	4.6% - 2 <sup>nd</sup> lowest, after Philippines (4.5%)	12.5%
Preferred ASEAN response on the SCS	ASEAN should welcome the military presence of other powers in the SCS.	22.9% - highest in ASEAN	11.8%
	ASEAN should discourage non-claimants from getting involved in the SCS issue.	3.4% - lowest in ASEAN	12.8%

Source: *State of Southeast Asia 2021 Survey*<sup>21</sup>

## **VIETNAM’S STATECRAFT: PRACTICAL AGENDA AND STRATEGIC HEDGING**

On its part, hosting Wang Yi provided Vietnam with an opportunity to push its own agendas, including boosting ties with China, promoting practical cooperation to address its domestic concerns and existing issues in bilateral relations, and maintaining its strategic balance between the US and China.

### *Improving ties with China*

Vietnam wanted to use Wang Yi’s visit to boost its ties with China, given that bilateral exchanges had been rather limited in 2020 despite it being the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of bilateral diplomatic relations. There was no direct meeting between the two countries’ high-level leaders throughout 2020. Not only Wang Yi but also Chinese Defence Minister Wei Fenghe and CPC foreign affairs chief Yang Jiechi skipped Vietnam in their regional tours. There

were three main reasons for this: Covid-19 restrictions; differences on the SCS dispute;<sup>22</sup> and Vietnam's preoccupation with the organisation of the CPV's 13<sup>th</sup> National Congress. China's direct high-level engagements with Vietnam only resumed after the CPV's 13<sup>th</sup> Congress concluded, with the visit by Chinese Minister of Public Security Zhao Kezhi in February followed by a visit by Minister of Defence Wei Fenghe in April. Wang Yi's visit therefore provided Hanoi with another chance to continue its high-level engagements with Beijing, and to signal to China that Vietnam values its relationship with Beijing despite its frequency of exchanges with the US and its allies. Vietnamese leaders apparently tried to show Vietnam's appreciation of bilateral ties by arranging for Wang Yi to be received by both General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong and Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh, in addition to his meetings with Deputy Prime Minister Pham Binh Minh and Foreign Minister Bui Thanh Son.

### *Promoting practical cooperation*

Wang Yi's visit also provided Vietnam with an opportunity to address its domestic concerns as well as existing issues in bilateral relations. Due to the latest surge of Covid-19 infections, Vietnam's current top priority is to speed up its vaccination programme to contain the virus and facilitate economic reopening. The three more million vaccine doses pledged by Wang Yi, once delivered, will contribute to Vietnam's vaccination drive. Vietnam's aim is to inoculate up to 70% of its population by this year-end. On 10 September, the first day of Wang Yi's visit, Vietnam's Ministry of Health approved Hayat-Vax, a vaccine jointly produced by Sinopharm and G42 of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), for emergency use, suggesting that Hayat-Vax may be the vaccine donated by China. During Wang Yi's visit, news of Hanoi using Sinopharm's Vero Cell vaccine to inoculate its population was reported prominently by the local media.<sup>23</sup>

Other issues addressed during Wang Yi's meetings with Vietnamese leaders included trade, infrastructure development and the SCS dispute. Vietnam is interested in maintaining stable trade flows and preventing any disruptions in the supply chain between the two countries; it also wants China to facilitate the import of Vietnamese agricultural products and help bring about a more balanced structure in bilateral trade. In terms of infrastructure development cooperation, Vietnam asked Beijing to bring the delayed Cat Linh-Ha Dong metro project in Hanoi and some other projects funded by Chinese loans into operation as early as possible.<sup>24</sup>

On the SCS issue, over the past twelve months, China has adopted a less aggressive approach towards Vietnam, with no major intrusion into Vietnamese waters being reported. This is notable given that Chinese intrusions and provocations in the waters of the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia have increased during the same period. However, this is likely a temporary lull, and Vietnam needs to work with China to manage future tensions and address remaining issues. For example, bilateral negotiations on the delimitation of the waters outside the mouth of the Tonkin Gulf have been stalled for years, while the Vietnam-China agreement on fishery cooperation in the Tonkin Gulf, which expired on 30 June 2020, has not been renewed. Wang Yi's visit and direct meetings between the two delegations may help untangle these issues in a more efficient manner.

*Strategic balance and hedging*

Hanoi is keenly aware of China's strategic anxiety with regard to the strengthening of Vietnam-US ties. Wang Yi's visit was therefore an occasion for Vietnam to assure China of its non-aligned foreign policy. In response to China's repeated incursions into Vietnam's maritime zones in the SCS, Hanoi has been expanding security ties with the US and its allies, but is nevertheless still keen to maintain a balance between the two big powers. Hanoi's reluctance to upgrade its relationship with Washington to the strategic partnership level despite the latter's repeated requests<sup>25</sup> is an indication of Hanoi's sensitivity to Beijing's concerns.

That said, the brewing SCS dispute and the Vietnamese public's longstanding distrust of China prompt the country to be cautious in its relations with Beijing. This means that while maintaining a stable, friendly and mutually beneficial relationship with China, Hanoi will continue to deepen ties with the US and its allies and partners to hedge against China's behaviours. This was evident in Vietnam's diplomatic activities before and during Wang Yi's visit. Vietnam hosted defence secretaries of the US and the UK in July, and US Vice President in August. Most notably, Japanese Defence Minister Nobuo Kishi visited Vietnam on the same dates as Wang Yi. During Kishi's visit, Vietnam and Japan signed an agreement on defence equipment and technology transfer, and announced plans to sign memorandums in military medicine and cybersecurity. The two sides also stated that they would bring their defence collaboration to a "new level", moving beyond the bilateral scope to actively contribute to the peace and stability of the region and the international community.<sup>26</sup> Hosting Wang Yi and Nobuo Kishi concurrently suggests Vietnam's conscious efforts to diversify its relations and maintain a strategic balance between the US, China and other major powers.

**CONCLUSION**

Over the past decade, Vietnam-China relations have gone through major ups and downs. Over the past year, with Beijing adopting a less aggressive stance towards Hanoi in the SCS, bilateral ties enjoyed a rare respite from tensions, and Wang Yi's visit could add to this renewed momentum in the improvement of bilateral relations. That said, Vietnam-China relations are fundamentally constrained by strategic distrust over the SCS dispute. As soon as China resumes its incursions into Vietnamese waters, which can happen any time, the current trend of improvement in bilateral ties will reverse.

The intensifying China-US strategic competition is another challenge for Hanoi. Vietnam has so far been adroit in maintaining a balance between the two great powers but it may not be easy to sustain this going forward. If Washington and Beijing fail to get what they want from Hanoi, they may decide that it is not worthwhile to continue investing in their ties with Vietnam. As such, while Hanoi continues to nurture ties with both China and the US, it should also think forward and be prepared to make tough choices on certain specific issues in the future. These include, among others, continuation of hydrocarbon projects in its EEZ despite Chinese warnings and obstructions, response to the Quad's overtures and US maritime initiatives such as the proposed Joint Statement of Maritime Principles for the Western Pacific,<sup>27</sup> and upgrading of ties with America to strategic partnership. More than

ever, Vietnam's foreign policy mantra, "firm in objectives, flexible in strategies and tactics", is being put to test.

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<sup>1</sup> In October 2020, Wang Yi visited Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Malaysia. In January 2021, he visited Brunei, Indonesia, Myanmar and the Philippines. Wang Yi met with Pham Binh Minh in the border province of Quang Ninh (Vietnam) in August 2020 to celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Vietnam-China land border treaty signing, but this event is not considered "an official visit". See "Vietnam, China celebrate 20th anniversary of land border treaty signing", *Vietnamplus.vn*, 24 August 2020, <https://en.vietnamplus.vn/vietnam-china-celebrate-20th-anniversary-of-land-border-treaty-signing/181767.vnp>.

<sup>2</sup> These included the visits by Defence Secretary Mark Esper (November 2019), Secretary of State Mike Pompeo (October 2020) and National Security Adviser Robert O'Brien (November 2020).

<sup>3</sup> The White House, Interim National Security Strategic Guidance, 03 March 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/03/03/interim-national-security-strategic-guidance/>.

<sup>4</sup> Xu Keyue and Zhang Dan, "Wang Yi's visit to neighbors expected to improve cooperation, not to counter US influence", *The Global Times*, 12 September 2021, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202109/1234043.shtml>.

<sup>5</sup> "Vietnam becomes China's largest trade partner in ASEAN: Chinese diplomat", *Nhan Dan Online*, 26 July 2018, <https://en.nhandan.vn/business/item/6428702-vietnam-becomes-china%E2%80%99s-largest-trade-partner-in-asean-chinese-diplomat.html>.

<sup>6</sup> "Vietnam becomes China's sixth largest trading partner", *Nhan Dan Online*, 19 January 2021, <https://en.nhandan.vn/business/item/9513202-vietnam-becomes-china%E2%80%99s-sixth-largest-trading-partner.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh Meets with Wang Yi", 12 September 2021, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1906432.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1906432.shtml).

<sup>8</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam Central Committee Nguyen Phu Trong Meets with Wang Yi", 11 September 2021, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjdt\\_665385/wshd\\_665389/t1906423.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/wshd_665389/t1906423.shtml).

<sup>9</sup> "Thủ tướng Phạm Minh Chính tiếp Ủy viên Quốc vụ, Bộ trưởng Ngoại giao Trung Quốc", *baohinhphu.vn*, 11 September 2021, <http://baohinhphu.vn/Thoi-su/Thu-tuong-Pham-Minh-Chinh-tiep-Uy-vien-Quoc-vu-Bo-truong-Ngoai-giao-Trung-Quoc/446179.vgp>.

<sup>10</sup> "Tổng Bí thư Nguyễn Phú Trọng tiếp Ủy viên Quốc vụ, Bộ trưởng Bộ Ngoại giao Trung Quốc", *dangcongsan.vn*, 11 September 2021, <https://dangcongsan.vn/thoi-su/tong-bi-thu-nguyen-phu-trong-tiep-uy-vien-quoc-vu-bo-truong-bo-ngoai-giao-trung-quoc-590720.html>.

<sup>11</sup> "Ngoại giao Việt Nam 'khôn khéo trước mọi đại cường'?", *BBC Tiếng Việt*, 15 September 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/vietnamese/vietnam-58559819>.

<sup>12</sup> Khairulanwar Zaini, "China's Vaccine Diplomacy in Southeast Asia – A Mixed Record", *ISEAS Perspective* 2021/86, 24 June 2021, <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/articles-commentaries/iseas-perspective/2021-86-chinas-vaccine-diplomacy-in-southeast-asia-a-mixed-record-by-khairulanwar-zaini/>.

<sup>13</sup> John Haltiwanger, "Kamala Harris was en route to Vietnam to donate 1 million COVID-19 vaccines when China swooped in to one-up the US and offered 2 million shots", *businessinsider.com*, 25 August 2021, <https://www.businessinsider.com/china-undercuts-kamala-harris-1-million-vaccine-donation-to-vietnam-2021-8>.

<sup>14</sup> The White House, Remarks by Vice President Harris at the National Institute of Hygiene and Epidemiology in Hanoi, Vietnam, 25 August 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing->

[room/speeches-remarks/2021/08/26/remarks-by-vice-president-harris-at-the-national-institute-of-hygiene-and-epidemiology-in-hanoi-vietnam/](#).

<sup>15</sup> Hoang Thi Ha, “A Tale of Two Vaccines in Vietnam”, *Fulcrum*, 12 July 2021, <https://fulcrum.sg/a-tale-of-two-vaccines-in-vietnam/>.

<sup>16</sup> Latit Kapur, “Britain’s Return to the Indo-Pacific”, *AMTI Update*, 11 August 2021, <https://amti.csis.org/britains-return-to-the-indo-pacific/>.

<sup>17</sup> “Carl Vinson Carrier Strike Group Enters South China Sea”, *pacom.mil*, 08 September 2021, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/2768009/carl-vinson-carrier-strike-group-enters-south-china-sea/>.

<sup>18</sup> Dzirhan Mahadzir, “6 Naval Task Groups From U.S., U.K., India, Japan and Australia Underway in Pacific”, *USNI News*, 30 August 2021, <https://news.usni.org/2021/08/30/6-naval-task-groups-from-u-s-u-k-india-japan-and-australia-underway-in-pacific>.

<sup>19</sup> “Nhóm tàu tác chiến Australia thăm Việt Nam”, *Vietnamnet*, 20 September 2021, <https://vietnamnet.vn/vn/the-gioi/viet-nam-va-the-gioi/nhom-tau-tac-chien-australia-tham-viet-nam-776519.html>.

<sup>20</sup> The White House, Remarks by Vice President Harris and President Phúc of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in Hanoi, Vietnam, 24 August 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/08/24/remarks-by-vice-president-harris-and-president-phuc-of-the-socialist-republic-of-vietnam-in-hanoi-vietnam/>.

<sup>21</sup> Sharon Seah *et al.*, *The State of Southeast Asia: 2021* (Singapore: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, 2021), <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/The-State-of-SEA-2021-v2.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> For example, due to China’s pressures, PetroVietnam cancelled production sharing contracts with Spanish firm Repsol in June 2020 and a drilling contract with Noble Corporation the following month. Both cases caused significant financial losses for Vietnam. See Le Hong Hiep, Vietnam: Managing Chinese Pressures around Vanguard Bank, *ISEAS Commentary* (2020/100), 23 July 2020, <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/media/commentaries/vietnam-managing-chinese-pressures-around-vanguard-bank/>.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, “Hà Nội tiếp nhận 1 triệu liều vaccine Vero Cell”, *VnExpress*, 9 September 2021, <https://vnexpress.net/ha-noi-tiep-nhan-1-trieu-lieu-vaccine-vero-cell-4353544.html>; “Cảnh cảnh người dân Hà Nội tiêm vắc-xin Vero Cell”, *Nguoi Lao Dong*, 11 September 2021, <https://nld.com.vn/thoi-su/can-canh-nguoi-dan-ha-noi-tiem-vac-xin-vero-cell-20210910123856004.htm>.

<sup>24</sup> “Bộ trưởng Ngoại giao Bùi Thanh Sơn hội đàm với Bộ trưởng Ngoại giao Trung Quốc Vương Nghị”, *Vietnam Government Portal*, 11 September 2021, <http://baochinhphu.vn/Doi-ngoai/Bo-truong-Ngoai-giao-Bui-Thanh-Son-hoi-dam-voi-Bo-truong-Ngoai-giao-Trung-Quoc-Vuong-Nghi/446182.vgp>

<sup>25</sup> “US V-P Kamala Harris urges more China pressure in meeting with Vietnam leader”, *The Straits Times*, 26 August 2021, <https://www.straitstimes.com/world/united-states/us-to-offer-vietnam-more-covid-19-vaccine-help-as-kamala-harris-visits>.

<sup>26</sup> Prashanth Parameswaran, “What’s in the Newly Regionalized Japan-Vietnam Defense Partnership?”, *The Diplomat*, 13 September 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/09/whats-in-the-newly-regionalized-japan-vietnam-defense-partnership/>.

<sup>27</sup> The White House, Remarks by Vice President Harris and President Phúc of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in Hanoi, Vietnam, 24 August 2021, *op. cit.*

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