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**VIETNAMESE FOREIGN POLICY AFTER
THE 11TH PARTY CONGRESS**

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PROCEEDINGS

RICHARD BUSH: Ladies and gentlemen, why don't we go ahead and get started? It's my great pleasure to welcome you here this afternoon. My name is Richard Bush. I'm the director of the Center for Northeast Asian Policy Studies here at the Brookings Institution.

Today the subject is "Vietnamese Foreign Policy After the 11th Party Congress." Party Congresses in Communist countries, including Vietnam and China, are very important because they are the culmination of a sort of huge policy review across the spectrum of issues. And the changes that are made will direct or guide policy for the next five years. And often, small changes in the formulation about foreign policy principles can dictate a big adjustment in reality.

So, with respect to Vietnam, we are very fortunate to have with us this spring Ta Minh Tuan, who comes to us from the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam, associated with the Foreign Ministry. And I could think of no better person to talk to us about Vietnamese foreign policy after the 11th Party Congress.

Tuan?

TUAN MINH TA: Thank you, Richard. Thank you very much for your coming, old friends and new friends.

Actually, when I think of this topic, you know, I think maybe it's quite, you know, not usual for some foreign observers and foreigners in general when we talk about foreign policy with Party Congress. But as Richard was correctly pointing out, the Party Congress is actually a very important event, you know, in terms of policymaking in the Communist countries. So in order to understand even foreign policy of Communist countries in general, and Vietnam in particular, we have to go all the way back to the Party Congress, because that's the place where the so-called original policy is made.

So, my talk today is about the Vietnamese foreign policy after the Congress, but actually I will touch upon the Congress itself -- the Party Congress itself, because you know, the deliberation of the Congress and what has actually come out of the Congress is important.

So, as you know, the Party Congress was held earlier this year. And after the Congress, the -- I would say the conventional wisdom outside Vietnam has been such that -- little change, actually, has been produced from the Congress. Meaning you know, people did not really see substantial changes, maybe at all. On the same, you know -- all the time with the Congress of the Communist Party.

But I would argue, you know, it's only partly true, you know. Because there's always something -- what do you call it? Continuation or continuities, and something changed.

So, first of all we have seen, you know, many things unchanged. But this is some key things that I don't see change, you know. First of all, you know, the reaffirmation of the Party -- the Communist Party's leading role in Vietnam. This is the key, you know. You cannot expect this change. Because if this changes, you know, it changes everything. So of course, this is the first thing we don't see change.

Second is ideological base, the ideology of the Party. This has not changed substantively -- substantially. But you can see, it has, you know, been modified and changed a bit when, you know, the Communist Party at the Ho Chi Minh Talks here. Of course, they already added Ho Chi Minh Talks in the last two Congresses, but, you know, the recent inventions of Communist Party, when they're at the Ho Chi Minh Talks -- in the ideologies.

And third is the maintenance of the regional structures of the Communist Party's powers. You know, maybe it's not like the Chinese system, you know, where you have maybe earlier nuclear leaderships. Now, of course people argue it's no longer a nuclear leadership in the Chinese Communist Party. But in Vietnam, its Communist Party is always kind of regional representations in the party structures, you know. No nuclear leadership at all. This continues to be the case at the 11th Party Congress.

Then something -- actually, had been talked a lot in the last, say, 10 years was the possibility of direct election of a general-secretary of the Party at the Congress itself. There was much hope at the -- you know, in the running up to the Party that the 11th Congress could decide on the direct elections. But, you know, as we all know, it did not come out. So it signifies, you know, the internal differences in the Party system and so on. So, no election of the Party chief.

But I think this discussion will go on up to the next Party Congress. And who knows, maybe next Party Congress we will have the direct elections at the Party Congress.

And then, the socialist-oriented market economy is -- will be maintained. Then, the goal -- the general broad goals of developments in Vietnam has been kept up to 2020. So the objective is to basically -- this is important -- basically turns Vietnam into an industrialized country. Many foreign observers when talking about this goal -- I don't know whether because of the Vietnamese version or English version just leaves out -- omit the words, basically. That makes a lot of difference, you know, in Vietnamese. Because, you know, it means that not yet to that full-fledged, you know, industrialized countries by 2020. It's so ambitious.

So, it's less ambitious when we talk about basically turns Vietnam into an industrial country. And maybe to become an industrial country after 2030. So this goal is kept.

And then the models, the model of the Communist Party in the last 10

years, you know. Prosperous people, strong country is just democratic and civilized societies. That's, you know, the main goal and motive of the Communist Party.

Now, what changed at the Party Congress? Of course, as I said earlier, we have lots of changes. But this is, I think, key changes that I want to mention. First, we have seen quite, you know, open -- a sense or utmost feel of openness and more freedoms of choice at the Party Congress. You know, this kind of feeling could be felt at the Party's meeting itself, when people -- the delegates to the Congress actually had quite heated -- very lively debate over the Party's documents and policy. And you see, I just cited an example of the election process in the Party itself. It reflects, you know, the changes within the Party system when it comes to more freedom of choice.

First of all, we see the election of the Central committees -- Standing Committees. We have 175 seats, official seats, but we have 218 candidates standing for the elections. And for 25 alternate seats we have 61 candidates for elections. So, the number of candidates were more -- quite more, you know, than the seats available. So it means that not -- no, 10, 20 years ago, maybe, like, you know, few peoples -- a few more candidates than the total number of seats available. But now, it was different. You see, in the case of alternate seats it's more than double. And in the official seats, you know, it's like, I think, more than 20 percent higher than the required -- the necessary candidates for the seats.

And the most, I think, surprising, you know, event was on one incumbent political member lost at the election. This was unprecedented. It never happened in Vietnam's Communist Party Congress before. So, a political member recommended by the Party's supposed to continue, you know, his job, but he lost. He did not get enough votes to be reelected. And some incumbent ministers, you know, also lost their Party's high-ranking post. You know, they did not get elected.

And two new political bureau members elected, you know, this time with only one term in the Central Standing Committees. More often than not, it's kind of a general agreement that at least you have to serve two terms in the Central Standing Committee before you go up the ranks, like members of secretary or member of Politburo. But this time, no, you know. These two guys actually elected with only one, you know, term -- last term the 10 Congress.

So, it was kind of a big change, you know. It means that you can elect to the highest, you know, positions in the Party with relatively, you know, less time serving in the Central Standing Committees.

Then, the second points of the chain here is we see out of this Congress was some -- I would say it's not some, but many new faces. I would say the introduction of new blood or injection of new blood into the Party's operators. We have 72 new members, you know, elected for the first time, accounting for 41.14 percent of the total seats in the Central Party. They are brand new, so they will bring new ideas, new aspirations, you know. Everything is new. So it's a big change in the Party's personnel.

And we have 16 members elected from alternate positions. That means from the 10 Congress, they created -- the Communist Party created a roster of alternate seats, you know. So these people were supposed to get into the Standing Committees officially in the next Party Congress. But you see, last Congress -- in the 10 Congress there was 20 alternate, you know, members. But at the 11th Congress, only 16 were elected to the Standing Committees and 4 lost. Meaning, remain in the alternate seats. It doesn't mean that, you know, when the Party endorses the list, then you got into the Central committees.

And we have, you know, what we call the princelings. We have three, this time. Two -- one from the son of former General Secretary (inaudible). One son of Prime Minister (inaudible), and the other son of one former Politburo members, Mr. Chi. So, you started to see similar things that happened in China the princelings. Now it happens in Vietnam.

So, all this change at the Party Congress actually have, you know, wide impacts on the upcoming, you know, general election in Vietnam. Because when we talk about policy we talk about, you know, also the change in politics in countries. And the upcoming -- next week, actually -- general elections in Vietnam is also important. Because we could expect more -- even more changes.

Because as a party, when you have very strict rules and people -- and members of the party are supposed -- are expected to abide by the party lines and things. So when it comes to general elections, you know, millions of people -- more than 30 million Vietnamese people will go to the polls. So you see, you know, huge differences in terms of, you know, opinions and ideas.

So it's even more difficult for the candidates to get elected. So this time, you see we have all levels of elections. You know, national election to the National Assemblies, the equivalent to the Congress here. And we have provincial elections. We have, you know, prefecture elections and we have even the -- what you call it? -- the community elections. So we have the general elections, four years elections.

But here, I just want to mention two, because they are most important, the provincial and the national. As the National Assemblies, right now the list of candidates is quite, you know, impressive -- sorry. We have only 500 seats at the National Assemblies, but now we have 830 candidates competing for these seats. And out of 830, we have 118 candidates without party membership. They are not Communist Party members. So, 14.21 percent are not Communist Party standing for the election.

And we have 183 so-called young people accounting for 22 percent. So, young people come out more and more. They want to be involved in politics at national levels. And we have 15 self-nominated candidates. Only small number, but anyway, they're self-nominated and endorsed for the election.

And at the provincial people's committee's level, we see the similar ratio, you know. We have more than 3,800 seats, but we have 5,965 candidates competing for the seats. So -- and we have the non-Party candidates as well accounting for 14.62 percent. They are not Party members.

And then the young people, 20.3 percent. And then the self-nominated, we have 25 self-nominated endorsed already standing for election, only 0.41. It's not so impressive, but I think it's there. It's happening even now. You can self-nominate. If you get approved, then you are on the list of candidates.

Now, with this, you know, the kind of new changes in the mindset -- in political's way of thinking. And more openness, you know, at the Party. And the running of the upcoming to the general elections. Now, we see the impacts of this on new dimension of Vietnamese politics on the foreign policy.

So what happens with the foreign policy at the Party Congress? First, I think we have witnessed some degree of more openness and receptive foreign policymaking and deliberation process. This was, I think, the most important change in the foreign policymaking in Vietnam. Because you can see changes in the, you know, policy substance and things like that. But the process is really important, because the process sets norms and standards.

If you follow a process, it will improve, you know, the way of policymaking. So if the process was, I think, very much -- actually, it impressed me. Before the Party's, you know, various research institutions was asked to do the research on international relations and foreign policy to provide the Party's with their ideas, you know, input. So, you know, the Party was quite open to new ideas, new inputs into the policymaking. And why I say receptive, because many of the ideas and opinions put forward by research institutions are actually reflected in the Party documents.

And actually, our institution -- the Diplomatic Academy -- also contributed partly in a small way, of course, to the foreign policy section of the Party documents. And that's why I could say, you know, the Party was receptive. Because our opinion -- I was -- I knew it. It was there. So, this is important. So, the Party was, you know, more open.

Because of that, so you see in the Party documents foreign policy section, you could feel kind of more pragmatic world view inside the Party's -- first of all, you see the Party has acknowledge all the current world trends. And if you read the text itself, you could not differentiate and you could not tell actually the difference between the similar documents, maybe prepared here in Brookings or CSS or anywhere on international relations. On the new elective languages of international relations are there. You can see all of this. That means, you know, in the Communist Party documents it reflects the worldview of the Party has changed really up to today. You know, what you see, you observe happening in the world are reflected in these documents.

Second, the Party also evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of

international system. Earlier, maybe you see only, you know, good things, you know. Not witness at all. But now they have to elaborate on the pros and cons of it. The international environment in which Vietnam has had to move.

And third is the further downplaying of the role of ideologies. You still detect and feel the ideology goal factors into elements in the Party documents in the foreign policy sections. But it's not too much, it's not too much. Even the strongest part of the documents are talking about the friction between the Vietnamese Communist Party and Communist Socialist Workers' Party in the world, things like that, supporting of those parties in the world. But you know, with a very interesting sort of, you know, condition -- with the condition that, you know, it has to serve our national interest -- the Vietnam national interest. I mean, based on national interest, even where it comes to relations between the Communist Party and other parties. So, it's kind of pragmatic. It's no -- I think it's not orthodox, kind of, you know, Communist ideologies as we saw in 1970 or '80s. No, not that.

Then we have seen the importance -- the greater importance of the role of the foreign relations. That means the Party acknowledges the importance of foreign relations. This is also important. It changes the way the Party sees foreign policy and how they conduct foreign relations or international relations.

Number one, in all the Party documents -- we have three Party documents coming out of the Party Congress. One is called the National Construction Platform up to 2020, and we have the Social Economic Strategy, Development Strategy, and we have the Party Reports. So all of these documents, you know, we have a separate section for foreign policy. So, the Party acknowledges the position of foreign policy in the Party's documents.

Second, we also see the closer, you know, combinations between the social economic developments, national defense, and public securities, and foreign relations. It was stressed earlier in the last two or three -- I would say, three Party Congresses where it's further strengthened, you know, further enhanced in this Party's documents, you know. That means the relationship between this defense, economic developments, and foreign relations, these three, now, fronts fuse into one set of foreign policy strategies.

And last, the more representation of the Foreign Ministry in the Central Standing Committees. This is kind of interesting. We got three men elected to the Central committees from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I don't recall any point in the history of Ministry of Foreign Affairs when we had three -- no -- yeah, three members of the Standing Committees minus the minister. That means we are going to have a minister that are not ministers. These three men are not ministers. They are deputy minister, vice minister. So if we have a new minister which is appointed -- not appointed out of these three, then we have another man from our side. So we have enough -- must be a Standing Committee member, so four. Should be four. So at least now, as the minister of foreign affairs, three. And good -- one could come. So, could be four in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

So it's really something, it really means something. That means the position of foreign policy and foreign relations has been quite, I think, you know, heightened. You know, the standing is more important now.

Now, when it comes to foreign policy itself, the text -- the spirit of the foreign policy in the Party documents, we have some important points here. Many things there, but I just mentioned some important things and changes or modifications.

Number one, the Party really lays emphasis on international integrations in proactive manners. You should pay attention to international integration. It's not economic integration anymore. Earlier, before this Party Congress in all Party documents - official documents, it was international economic integration. That means, stress more on economic dimensions of integration.

But now, the Party dropped the word "economics," so it's significant. It means that from now on integration means, you know, comprehensive, multifaceted integration. That means, not only economic integration anymore. Security, cultural, education, you know, all. Even political integration. So, it really has, you know, huge meanings with just small changes in the wording of this. So, but it took like, you know, almost 10 years of debate within the Party. Then we came out with this.

And then the Party also stressed the elevation of Vietnam's international standing. So this is an objective. The foreign policy has to serve, you know, to elevate the international standing of Vietnam. So it means that, you know, you have to work hard, work more, in all directions, you know. Within international forums, international organizations, regional organizations, in all fronts -- diplomatic fronts. So that's the meaning of this.

And then, for the first time in the Party history, national interest is specifically mentioned in the Party documents. This was the first time national interest is there in the Congress Party documents. It means national interest is top priority. Whatever you do, you have to serve national interests. Earlier, you know, it was rarely defined, here and there. But it was not specifically, you know, mentioned. But now it is on the table, national interest.

Then we have the model -- the modified version of the 10 Party Congress model. Vietnam wants to be a reliable friend and partner, and a responsible member of the international community. Now they add responsible members. Earlier, it was only reliable friend and partner, but now this Party adds responsible member. That means, you play -- you know, the same rules of international relations. When you come to the international games, you have to be part of it. And you have to play the games, and you must be -- you should play a responsible role, you know? So, it was proof when Vietnam served as a UN Security Council non-permanent member 2008/2009. It was a big show. And Vietnam was a chair of ASEAN 2010. And, you know, Vietnam, you know, was admitted to the WTO in 2007, for example. So it's on this, you know -- proves this.

And then, equal and mutually beneficial cooperation. Well, you know, you -- when you first cooperate -- international cooperation, you have to base it on mutual beneficials. You cannot really, you know, base your relationship or cooperation on, you know, purely ideologies anymore. So, you have to have benefits and mutual benefits. You think about your interests, but you also think about other interests. So that's a big change, you know. In 1970s, 1980s, or even early 1990s, it was not the case.

And it's ready to open dialogue on human rights and democracy. This is quite a -- I mean, you know, it really surprised me. I did not think that it was there in the Party documents, but I had to check it. It was there. The Party said that, you know, it's ready to hold dialogues on human rights and democracy with any country's international organization, regional organization. So it acknowledges the issues of human rights and democracy in Vietnam, you know? We should have dialogue. If anything that we have differences, we can sit down and talk.

And also, you know, enhancing the people-to-people exchange. This is maybe nothing new, but it's the new phrase in the Party documents.

And last but not least, this is really a big -- well, not fight, but a big debate in Vietnam, particularly among the research institutions in Vietnam, when -- before the Party Congress when we provide our input in the Party documents, the positioning of Vietnam in Southeast Asia as a member of ASEAN. That means you have to have an anchor of your foreign policy. Where, what, and where you define yourself, you know, where you are affiliated yourself, with what? With whom? And what is most important? And I think this is the answer.

ASEAN will be the most important anchor of Vietnam's foreign policy, you know. You are part of ASEAN, you are part of -- you are a Southeast Asian country. So you have to look to the world from Southeast Asian, you know, perspective. And you are part of the ASEAN community. So you have to support the ASEAN community-building. So, this is really a big debate. But it finally has got into the Party documents.

Now, challenges ahead. You know, with that kind of foreign policy set forth by the Party Congress, you know, I see both internal and external challenges to the conduct of the foreign policy in the coming years. First, internally, I think there's a number of challenges. But here I just put maybe the two most important.

First of all, it's the capacity constraints to back the foreign policy. Because, you know, you are foreign policy experts so I don't think I need to talk too much about this. But when it comes to the capacity constraint I think, you know, the internal differences remain. You know, in every party, in the Communist Party of Vietnam, too, some sort of -- some degree, some level of difference remains.

But the most important thing is that at this point in time, there's no real strongman on foreign policy in control. That means we -- most probably, we don't have

the Foreign Minister with the membership in the Politburo. That's a problem, because the Foreign Minister is supposed to be a member of Politburo. But it's quite clear that we are not going to have one. So, the voice of Ministry of Foreign Affairs will be put in question, you know, whether Ministry of Foreign Affairs can compete with other ministries like, you know, Public Security or Ministry of Defense when they have representation as the Politburo.

Remembering that, at this Congress two men from Public Security elected to Politburo. That means in the Politburo we have one man from Defense and two men from Public Security. So we don't have any guys from Foreign Ministry. So that will be problems when it comes to the conduct of foreign policies, you know, how to recognize, you know, different views, interests, you know, at the top levels, top policymaking levels.

And of course, in the last two years we have seen, you know, lots of problems in economies -- in our economies, you know. What you call it, you know, the shaking economies now with lots of problems. You know, it's big.

And then, what I call chronic problems in Vietnam. the Party has to solve them, otherwise it's quite difficult because they have implications for foreign policy, the conduct of international relations.

Number one, rampant corruption. This is an open secret the Party acknowledges, regarding as a kind of national vice. And, you know, the first priority in the Party is to fight corruption. So, rampant corruption is there. But more importantly is the erosion of the people's confidence in the Party. You know, you have to make people confident of your policy, what you do.

But, you know, recent cases have shown that the way the government, the Party handles some domestic issues actually has put the Party in some sort of doubt whether it's strong enough to, you know, handle big issues like Vinashin, you know. If you read Vietnamese papers, Vinashin is a big case, \$5 billion lost. I don't know, maybe because of corruption, because of things. But, you know, so far it's really big. I mean, sticky point in Vietnamese politics and society now. But the Party hasn't been able to, you know, really solve it to the people's satisfaction.

Okay, so this really -- all of these internal dimensions actually have some sort of implication for Vietnam's foreign policy because it has to do with Vietnam's image in the world. So it's really a big thing.

And external -- I have three points, to wrap up. Difficulty in, you know, deepening foreign relations because Vietnam has a relationship with 179 countries in the world, 179; strategic partnership relationship with 8 members of 170 international regional organizations, you know. I mean, these are kind of big things.

But, you know, when you ask whether you have a real friend who will come to help you when you have problems, that will be a big question. So, how to deepen the

foreign relations, you know? Real friends, you know, real partners, you know, on whom you can rely when you need their help. So, how to do it, that's a big thing.

Then, I think still the stalemate in the relationship between Vietnam, China, and U.S. is still very much there. It's difficult. How to, you know, promote relationship with the U.S., you know, at the same time not to damage it's relationship with China and vice versa, you know. It's kind of doing a balancing act. It's not easy, not easy at all. And this is a big problem, big parcel for Vietnam that, you know, the Party and the government have to deal with to find a way to go about.

And last, I think, is, of course, it's well known, you know, the pressure -- international pressure on human rights and democracy, mostly from the West, of course, but still there. You know, say in Vietnam-U.S. relations, for example, Vietnam-EU relations, you know, to some extent, Vietnam-Australia relations, but, you know, it always appears in Vietnam's dialogue with all these countries. So these kind of problems are -- I think, the Vietnamese leaders have to solve, at least to address, to some extent, to promote its new -- not new, but, you know, some sort of modified foreign policy.

Thank you. I'm sorry I ran a bit long. But you know, I hope it's okay.

DR. BUSH: Good, thank you. Stay right there, don't move. Thank you very much. It's very interesting. It opens a lot of questions. I have some questions, I'm sure people in the audience have questions. But I'm going to let the audience go first.

So, you can call on people. When you are called on, identify yourself and we'll go from there. Thank you.

DR. TA: Thank you, Richard. Okay, yes. Ted, please.

QUESTION: Ted Piccone at Brookings. That was a great presentation and I'm not an expert by any means about Vietnam, so I apologize if my question's a little obvious. But your points about how the Party Congress led to new faces and the 14 percent who are not members of the Party and elected, I'd be curious to know a little more about that. How does that work? How do you get approved to be a candidate if you're not a member of the Party? Is that a brand-new element or something that's always been there, it's just taking up a little bit?

And then on the foreign policy, I was struck by one thing in particular. What you said, it's the first time that national interests are identified as a top priority. And it just seems to me that every state identifies national interest as a top priority. So is this just a leftover of a more ideological path? And finally they're catching up to reality -- the rhetoric is catching up to reality? Would you say more about that?

DR. TA: Okay. Thank you.

The first question is actually -- we have the election law. You are not

required, Party members, to be elected to the general assemblies or, you know, the People's Province or the People's Council. You are not required. There is no such requirement in the law at all. That means, you are free to stand for election.

The point is, because Vietnam is led by the Party -- so the Party itself actually recommends people to stand for election. Okay? So it's their choice, number one.

Number two, how to get yourself into the list, right? There's a process. It's specifically, you know, mentioned in the laws. The process is that, you know, you have prepared papers. You must be qualified with all the process. So when you nominate yourself, you know, you have to go to some certain process. For example, you have to get enough -- not votes, but some sort of certification from your working, you know, institution, for example, if you are government officials, or, you know, from the community. And then you go to the (inaudible) front, the local (inaudible) front for registration.

And you know, when you have all the -- you know, the people self-nominate in the primary list, then you -- they have the election committees at all levels. They will look into your papers. And if you are qualified, then you can process. But more often that not, you know, many candidates actually are disqualified, you know, for many reasons. For example, in our law if you run into troubles like, you know, someone sent out a letter of, say, petition accusing you of bribery, corruption, or criminal charges, or whatever reason. You know, that means it takes time for the committee to look into those charges or allegations. So you -- if you run into trouble, it takes a lot of time. And more often than not, most of these troubles are correct. So you are automatically disqualified if you ran into trouble.

SPEAKER: Are you saying that non-Party members are bringing new ideas? What's the diversity of opinion you're bringing in that's new?

DR. TA: Not necessarily that if you are not, you know, not a Party member then you have fresh ideas, frankly. But at least, you know, you are not bound to the Party lines, okay? So somehow you are freer to, you know, express yourself in this kind of national assembly rather than the Party line. Because, you know, if you are a member of the Party -- whatever you have to do you do it. That was the first question.

The second question on the national interests. No. My answer is that Vietnam is -- the Communist Party actually has acknowledged the national interest since the fall of the Soviet Union. But what I said is that this was the first time the national interest as a terminology in international relations, in Vietnamese policy, was put, actually, in the Party documents.

But before that, of course the Party, the government had already conducted foreign policy based on national interest already. Otherwise, Vietnam could not, you know, get this far. After the fall of the Soviet Union the doubling of the ideology in the Party documents is very much there already. At the 8th Party Congress in 1996, the Party

had already recognized that ideology no longer guided international relations. They said that. So national interest was there.

People who conduct foreign policy, like people at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for example, they know very well national interest. It's top priority. But in order to put it into the Party documents, it took quite a while. You know, more than 10 years since 1996, when 8th Party Congress -- when the ideology was officially announced, no longer there guiding international relations up until this Congress, so it reflects, you know, some sort of slow, gradual change, the perception within the Party, okay? But national interest is very much there.

Yes, Bill?

QUESTION: Can you show your first slide?

DR. TA: Yes, sure.

QUESTION: You talk about change, more openness and freedom of choice and so forth. It strikes me that you're really talking about personalities. And there are some people who are thought to be crooks don't get reelected. That sometimes happens. And that some younger people are replacing some octogenarians. That occasionally happens as well.

But this is the crux of your presentation. Not the -- I'm sorry, the first one. The first slide, not this slide. There we go. This is the crux of your presentation. There's no change on the things that actually matter. I think that's the key point here.

And take for example -- they use the phrase, national interests. It's a fine, modern term to put into some public document or Party documents. But at the end of the day, who decides the national interests? It's right there.

So, it's interesting that there are new personalities. It's interesting that the country is demographically younger, is beginning to have a younger face among its public officials. But fundamentally, it strikes me that you -- by this slide, you are suggesting that there's really no difference.

DR. TA: Now, if you -- I think it seems to me that you look at it in a -- I mean, a sort of zero sum game thing, you know. This is -- okay, let me put it this way.

This is the framework when you have to work in. You have the Party there, you know. You have lots of elements inside the Party. So if you think that, okay, the bottom line is you have to change the Party, for example. You know, say leadership of the Party or the structure of the Party. If that's kind of change you expect, then you can argue that there's no change.

Because as I said from the very beginning, if you change that, then you

change everything. You change the whole thing. And there's nothing to say, you know, about it anymore.

So, when you look at change you have to look at it either from the outside -- the kind of abrupt total change, or you look at change from, you know -- within partial change, regular change. So, you know, this is how you look at it.

I agree with you. If you say no change, yes. No change because the structure is still there. You know, the Party leadership is still there. Things -- sure, that's true. But just like, you know, if you say Vietnam doesn't change at all in the last 20 years as compared to, say, China or Malaysia -- because we are still far behind, you know, in terms of income, for example. So the level of -- if you compare Vietnam in the same period with Malaysia, China, maybe Vietnam won't change, doesn't change.

But if you look into Vietnam itself, it's a new -- you know, whole new picture, sorry. So the same thing with the Party. You have to, first of all, acknowledge the change within the Party, you know. From one Congress to another, it actually reflects the change of the mentality, of the worldview. You know, many things.

In order to get this document in the Party, we have thousands of hours of discussion and things, you know, to just maybe phrase a word. It reflects really a big debate in Vietnam -- intellectual debate not only within the Party, because the process -- I say process is important. When the draft of the Party Congress documents was ready, it was made public at least two months before the Party Congress was held for the public's opinion. You can give your opinions. And lots of opinion is actually already reflected here.

So, that kind of change is there. So you should expect some sort of incremental, you know, slow, gradual change. You don't expect abrupt change in Vietnam, frankly. Even -- maybe I recall only one event, it was in 1986. It was really a turning point -- that's what we call a turning point in the policy in Vietnam. It was an abrupt change, change 100 percent. But now it's gradual. So, that's really the way you look at it.

So, you can argue no change, but I would say, yes. Yeah, the structural things like that may not be changing. But, you know, the substance itself is changing. And change for the better.

Okay, you.

QUESTION: Yes, sir. I'm Richard Finney, Radio Free Asia.

You mentioned one of Vietnam's external challenges being the pressure it receives from other countries on human rights and democracy issues. I wonder if you could say something more about that. For example, is the pressure justified? And how should the Party respond now? Do you see any change in how it might respond in the

future?

DR. TA: Well, the reason why I put it here is that first of all, it's not only because it's already there in the Party documents. But it has been things that the Party and the government have been dealing with for, say, 10 years now. Because, you know, the more you open to the outside world, you know, the more problems you face and human rights and democracy are things that you have to deal with. And the Party actually recognizes the fact. It has a policy, you know, trying to improve human rights, you know, and open dialogues with foreign partners, foreign countries. Not after this, but even well before this. Now we have a number of human rights rounds of dialogues with the United States, for example, with EU, for example, with Australians. So it was, you know, happening already.

But with this kind of, you know, acknowledgment in the Party documents, that means now you face it head on. And you have to do -- you have to deal with this. And you know, you find a way to resolve it, and to be ready to open even more to dialogue with other countries.

So I think in the future, this issue will not go away. It will remain in Vietnam's bilateral relationship with many countries, for example, the U.S. But I really believe -- I strongly believe that, you know, the Vietnamese governments will be much more open to dialogue. And it's ongoing. And let's see what is happening with the upcoming political security dialogue between Vietnam and U.S.

But I personally think that, you know, now the Party recognizes these issues and tries to find a way to address this seriously.

Okay, Tung, first?

QUESTION: Yeah. (inaudible) I think the (inaudible) interesting for us to see the change in the foreign policy of Vietnam. And I think that (inaudible) the starting point, which is the parties (inaudible) leading force of the country (inaudible) fundamental change. And I think (inaudible) should have some issue with that. That (inaudible) might be -- starts from the three basic assumptions. One, if the Party is there, something is wrong with the change -- with the choice of the policy. And if the Party is there, the people have no say in that if the Party is there. So, the foreign policy is not acceptable to the partners in the region of the world.

And I think that we should have something to discuss the choices of the foreign policy. Is -- I think it's (inaudible) one since 1986. And the Party doesn't -- the Party does allow (inaudible). That is the people have found ways to put their insights and suggestions in the making and implementation of foreign policy.

And three, (inaudible) the foreign policy, it has been acknowledged by neighboring countries (inaudible). And I think that the cooperation and participation (inaudible), say, for example, organization between ASEAN and VAS and APAC is

(inaudible) by the original international community.

So I think that the things in black and white is not really half full in order to explain the change between the (inaudible) of the foreign policy of Vietnam. And I quite agree with what (inaudible) about changes in foreign policy (inaudible) to make the list shorter for all (inaudible), one, condition (inaudible) emphasizing the foreign policy; two, the international integration; and three, ASEAN; and four, (inaudible).

And I think that that would be easier to see the changes through that kind of perspective. And I would like to take issue with one saying that the challenge -- one of the challenges of the foreign policy of Vietnam is the stalemate (inaudible) between Vietnam and the United States. I don't think so, because these small points that I have just mentioned actually pave the way for the improvement and the (inaudible) of the relationship between Vietnam and the United States. One (inaudible) Vietnam and the United States are defining the convergence of national interests and we can even include South China Sea and the interests of the country. Two, international cooperation (inaudible) international cooperation means comprehensive (inaudible).

And at the military, and that is a very good way for the two countries to have relations in the future. ASEAN -- ASEAN is really important for Vietnam. It has been effective in the foreign policy in Vietnam by the 11th Congress. And I'd like to share with you, ASEAN is actually helping the country a lot. And Vietnam is now finding ASEAN a real enemy. We have ASEAN to turn into (inaudible). ASEAN as the summit which acted last week, ASEAN has agreed to say (inaudible) the COC should be the role of ASEAN in next year, 2012, after 10 years of (inaudible) COC.

Mekong -- the last government has agreed to stop the Mekong projects on the upper one of the Mekong River, and that is because of ASEAN. So that is the two impressing -- two big challenges for Vietnam in terms of foreign policy, and (inaudible) ASEAN. So we have a real ASEAN -- a real ally (inaudible) ASEAN.

And (inaudible) is foreign policy implementation. And I just think ASEAN (inaudible) ASEAN is a case in point. And I think that here, when I'm based in Washington, D.C., I really see it is the acknowledgment of (inaudible) Vietnam really (inaudible) in making ASEAN become a very viable organism for -- not only for visa security (inaudible), but it's (inaudible).

So I think that we always have (inaudible) I think of in terms of foreign policy, but it's not (inaudible).

DR. TA: Okay, thank you. Ambassador Minh first?

QUESTION: I don't have any questions. Thank you, Dr. Tuan. I am Ho-Jin Lee of CNAPS.

Partly, I would like to add to what the previous speaker mentioned about

when it comes to the object of your foreign policy to place on the national interest.

Virtually every country is interested in national interest, but it may bring about some pitfalls. Too much emphasis on the national interest. Because I don't see in your presentation any other elements in a broad range of foreign policy issues.

For example, in the Party Congress documents or in your foreign policy document, I ask you whether or not you have some other universal task for every country's diplomacy, for example, to promote regional peace and to address any terrorism. All kinds -- should invite also -- you are very defensive when you mentioned the pressure from other countries toward Vietnamese human rights problems. But I understand in your participation -- in ASEAN, for example -- you are participating in the discussion -- in the promotion of the democracy and the human rights.

So that's the point I would like to hear from you, about Vietnamese policy lines on those universal values. Some common diplomatic tasks.

And my second question is about the external challenges in terms of the foreign policy conducting. And you mentioned the rampant corruptions. It's not clear to me -- in matter of fact, your whole image of Vietnam when corruption still is rampant there. So, I don't see any link between your foreign policy and the domestic problems of corruption.

Have you linked these corruption issues to the challenges to foreign policies?

DR. TA: Your first question, Ambassador -- actually, as I said earlier, you know, I just put on the slides some important, some essential points in the Party's documents. And in the foreign policy section of the documents, it's quite long. It's quite long, and everything is -- and at a point that I also said, you know, the pragmatic sort of worldview. On the language issue, you know, borrowing from the international relations discourse are there.

You know, you name it terrorism, you know, what economic crisis, and change in values. Everything -- I would say, you know, you can find surprisingly everything there. But I just picked some important things to show you, you know, how the Communist Party reflects international realities in their Party documents. Just to say that, you know, their world view has quite, you know, changed and really up-to-date to what, you know, the international reality is.

So on the elements that you call it -- the values, you know, international tasks of peace, securities, everything is there. So I just pick only some points that I see, you know, quite a modification. Or, you know, changes in foreign policy and other elements I just leave out.

If you are interested I will give you the English version of the documents.

You know, it's there on the website already. You know, it's quite a long section of foreign policy. So, that's to your first question.

The second question. You know, I put corruption -- rampant corruption as an internal challenge to the conduct of foreign policy, to foreign policy. That's according to, you know, to my personal observation. There is quite a link. Because you know, when it comes to corruption, you know, it comes to governance. Right? So, I already hinted that, you know, this image of Vietnam is really important. It's Vietnam in the eyes of the international community, you know, could be a step or secure peaceful countries.

You know, that's something that a tri-foreign investor, you know. You don't have Thailand's unstable politics, or you don't have problems, you know, terrorisms in Indonesia or in Southern Thailand or in the Philippines. You know, Vietnam in the same - you know, is really a good destination for investment.

But, you know, when it comes to, you know, corruption, then you have real big problems. And it would really damage Vietnam's image, you know, in the eyes of the international community. Because it really has to do with governance.

Now, they put question -- you know, raise the questions of Vietnamese governments to deal with its own governance. You know, how you handle this? You know, it already says, you know, it's a reliable partner and friends of international communities and responsible members, things like that. But, you know, if you are not able to deal with your own domestic internal problems then, you know, you have to face a big question.

So, because this is really big in Vietnam. The Party also says that, frankly speaking. So you have to face this. So that's why I put it in, because this is an internal -- but has international implication of it. All right?

Okay, thank you. Who else? You, first and then (inaudible). Yes, please.

QUESTION: My name is Colin Beech. I'm with the American Bar Association World Rule of Law Initiative. I'd like to follow up on the question from the gentleman from Radio Free Asia.

Do you see dialogue on human rights and democracy proceeding primarily on a bilateral state-to-state basis? Or do you perceive enhanced cooperation beyond state actors such as NGOs or international organizations as well?

DR. TA: Well, I put it in two layers, two tiers. Number one, at the national level Vietnam has conducted human rights democracy dialogues on bilateral, you know -- with many countries, as I mentioned. But also, at regional international levels, I would say, yes.

Take ASEAN as an example. In ASEAN with the ASEAN charters, we

have ASEAN's human rights bodies, right? And Vietnam was part of it.

Frankly speaking, you know, initially Vietnam was quite, you know, hesitant with the ideas and was not so supportive of that idea, I would say. But, you know, going along with the process of ASEAN community-building and up to the point when ASEAN decided on the ASEAN charters and the human rights body, Vietnam got along. Got along very well.

It means that Vietnam actually slowly changes its perception. And it will say, you know, well it's good. Now we have the human rights borrowing ASEAN -- you know, ASEAN was right. We should have that. Why not? Maybe the mechanisms, you know -- the enforcement, supervisions, all of these things could be worked out later. You know, we slowly talk with each other to see how we work it out -- work them out, actually.

But, okay, we agree with that. So it's kind of, you know, multilayered sort of dialogues. Not only bilateral, but reasonable multilaterals. And you know, at the UN -- in the UN system, too, you know, whenever they have the human rights dialogues or things, Vietnam never drops out. You will see some other countries feel frustrated with the heat. They could not stand the heat of discussion, they just drop out. But Vietnam never drops out.

So, you know, you say that. Okay. We can really talk. Of course, I say we still have many problems. But at least we acknowledge the problems. And the second part you ask about -- what? I just -- skip it --

QUESTION: Cooperation with non-government --

DR. TA: Oh, cooperation with non-governmental organizations.

My last point in the slide I mentioned the international pressure on human rights and democracy, you know part of which actually comes from non-governmental organizations -- international non-governmental organizations. But, frankly speaking, in Vietnam now not only the government but nongovernmental organizations in Vietnam and the social organizations in Vietnam -- professional organizations in Vietnam -- are working, you know, quite closely with international NGOs, which number almost 600 in Vietnam, on various issues to address human rights issues.

Because human rights, you know, is a far and wide-ranging issue. Not only the basic rights, but you know, many things. So, that kind of so-called track-two dialogue -- you know, track-three dialogue between Vietnam and other international organizations on human rights and democracy are ongoing.

And surprisingly enough, if you come to Vietnam it's not difficult to get, you know, paper documents coming out of a number of seminars, you know, conferences on these same issues. Human rights, you know, democracy, things like that. It's quite easy to get it, you know. It's not like many people would think. You know people think, when you

talk about human rights and democracy in Vietnam, it's a taboo, you know. It's something forbidden and you cannot talk about it. No, no, it's not like that. So I would say, it's going on. Yeah.

Yes, (inaudible)?

QUESTION: Thank you, Tuan, for your presentation. I would like to first clarify one point. You used to serve as the head of the Diplomatic Academy Vietnam.

DR. TA: No.

SPEAKER: No?

MR. TUAN: It's not –

SPEAKER: Of the research (inaudible)?

DR. TA: Yeah. We have the Office for Research Management -- Research Project Management where we actually oversee on the research projects of Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Because our institution is -- actually, it serves as a teaching and research wing of Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

So, in which we have, you know, various functions. Actually, one of which is to supervise -- to oversee all the research projects and research works of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. And my office, actually, deals with -- on the research of Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

SPEAKER: Research Projects of the Diplomatic –

DR. TA: Yeah –

SPEAKER: -- Academy. Thank you very much.

DR. TA: Okay.

SPEAKER: Right now, are you wearing that hat?

DR. TA: No. I don't think so. I'm here at Brookings. I'm a Brookings scholar, visiting fellow.

QUESTION: I'm Genie Nguyen. I'm with Voice of Vietnamese Americans. I'm here to speak on behalf of the Vietnamese people.

DR. TA: Okay.

SPEAKER: And I thank you for the presentation. And I would like to

thank all the questions, because we feel that onto -- from the (inaudible) he said from the beginning that (inaudible) of the structure would change. Even if you want it changed, it would not have happened. And that was what you told us at the end, of the challenges.

And then another question came up many times. It's national interest. And then many times I heard you say about human rights. And then, the focus was on international image. So, all that were focused. Where do the Vietnamese people stand?

I would like to quote Dr. (inaudible). He was by the foreign minister of Vietnam. Officially, he said, look at what's being done, not what being said. And I would like to clarify your presentation today just on documentation on that. It's not what's actually happening.

I know that yesterday, on the 15th, maybe, Vietnam government had exercised military actors to in preparation for the people of (inaudible) in case they create problems. (inaudible) for the last month had an (inaudible) area that was starving and international forces had come in to try to help.

Millions of dollars in bribes have tried to come in to support. And the government of Vietnam, what did they do? They practiced their exercise, military practice, to prevent uprising of the people. So, that's only one thing yesterday that I point out.

I would like to speak on the behalf of the Vietnamese people to say at this time everything on the table, everything being talked diplomatically truly doesn't have any impact on the people. One point you have pointed out very clearly, that the government has lost confidence from the people. People have no confidence anymore in the government. From everything they have done, from the (inaudible), from many other things, the abuse of power, the abuse of the dollars.

You said many times election law is written, it's not being obeyed. It's not being followed. Now you said that now, there are 800 candidates, only 500 seats. How did the candidates get in there? How were they chosen? All 800 candidates, were they not being approved by the Politburo. So then, the 14 percent of the non-Party members candidate, how effective can they be (inaudible)?

And the self-nominated candidates, how effective can they be (inaudible)? Not talking about all the lawyers -- the respected lawyers who speak for the people have been put in jail. So now, I talk to you separately. And I know you do your part.

We have a lot of expectation for the generations. And I am asking one question. What you presented, (inaudible)? Are we expecting for change from the government -- not from the government, from the people.

DR. TA: Okay. That's all?

SPEAKER: That's all.

DR. TA: All right, good.

First of all, I have to make myself very clear. Number one, what I said here is this. And you should not interpret it in a very -- I mean, how I say it? For example, I never said that the Vietnamese people lost all confidence in the government or the Party. I just -- please, I just say the erosion of the confidence.

That means, you know, when you see things, you know, you have to -- because you have to deal with a lot of problems, people has lost some sort of confidence. So you have to -- here and there, so you have to get it -- I use very carefully the word erosion of confidence. I do not -- you know, totally, you know, lost it. Because no government can survive without some certain level of people's confidence, okay?

So if the Vietnamese people -- and I believe myself. Even if -- you know, if you say, you know, even I am a Party -- a member of Party, I would say it like that. If people lost -- I mean, the 90- -- 86 million Vietnamese people have lost confidence totally in the government, I don't think even the Communist Party can survive. So, I didn't say that. I have to make it very clear.

So we are dealing with problems, though we have to recognize the problems. The first problem, to find a way to improve it. You know, to solve the problem and press ahead and improve. All right? So that's one thing. Because if you understood or interpret my saying -- my words -- in a not correct way, then maybe I will run into trouble. You know? Because I want to be understood clearly, you know. Loud and clear, and precisely. That's it. And I am not defending my government.

Because as I say, from the very beginning when I came here with Richard Bush, I said, no. I'm here as a, you know, visiting scholar. I talk, you know, in personal capacity. I'm not a government official anymore. But still, even those I need to be understood correctly.

Okay. Your problems you raised, first of all, you have to realize that this is the policy issue. That means I am talking about policy. This is the policy discussion. That means when it comes to policy, it comes to documents. And of course, you talk about action, things like that. I agree, that's a conducted policy. That could be a whole new thing. But this is -- my presentation is a foreign policy. And when I talk about policy, I have to come to documents.

Policy cannot be made in a vacuum. It has to be made, it has to be recorded, to be written down, things like that. So this is why I said you might not find it interesting or you may not find it convincing, but it's a reality. I present to you what I learned, what I observed from, you know, from the Party documents. So these four things.

Second thing is, you can -- you know, you say you can speak for the Vietnamese people. That's good, I appreciate that, no problem with me. I don't really

have too much information about the Teng Hua, but tell you what. I was born in Teng Hua. I'm a Teng Hua citizen, okay? So I can tell you this, you know. We are having problems right now. People are having difficulties, you know. Some people are not quite starving but, you know, having food problems, you know, lack of food, things like that. And officials, they are responsible. I have to say, officials in Teng Hua province and places have to be held responsible.

And now, recently the government is dealing with this, you know, work out, you know, solutions and, you know, advice -- as you say, you know, international organizations to come to help. And for the exercise, frankly speaking, I have no information, you know, concrete enough to tell you what it is for. That is your own information. I have no comment because, you know, I don't really know. But what I know is that the society is quite, you know, normal. It's not only there if you go to (inaudible), to other places, it is still the same.

So, it's a real -- so I don't know, the purpose, it could be different, but that's your interpretation, you know. I have no problem with your interpretation. But, you know, it's not my interpretation. Because simply I don't know, all right?

What else. Okay, no. I think that's -- yeah. I went down the list already. Thank you very much.

SPEAKER: The second part of the question was the implementation. How many percent --

DR. TA: Oh, okay. I'll just tell you only this thing. This is not the foreign policy, I said, made out in the vacuum because most of -- which actually was already -- has been already laid out for many years. Actually, since 1986, and more concretely in 1991. So, if -- okay. If you think -- this is for your thought. If you think that nothing has been done, the policy is that it just, you know, works on the paper. Then how could Vietnam -- like today? As I said, you know, member of international communities. Only international organizations. And it is recognized by all countries, you know. 179 countries recognize diplomatically having diplomatic relations. And, you know, full member of international communities.

So I think if the policy itself is not viable enough, is not good enough, and if the conduct of foreign policy is not good, then Vietnam would not have gone so far to this point. So that could be, you know, a point that you could think about.

Of course, I have to say, we still have problems. That's what I said. But that's a different thing, okay?

Okay, maybe we talk out of the room. Because time is up. Sorry, but we can talk --

DR. BUSH: Okay. We've come to the end of our time. But thank you, Tuan, for stimulating a really vigorous discussion. I appreciate that very much, and I want

to thank you for providing that vigorous discussion. And that's what we're here for.

So, at this point we'll close the formal part of our session. I expect there will be discussions that go on afterwards. But thank you very much for coming, and please join me in giving Tuan a round of applause. (Applause) Thanks.

DR. TA: Thank you, Richard. Thank you everybody for coming. Thanks a lot.

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