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US-VIETNAM RELATIONS: A CONVERSATION WITH
VIETNAM'S FOREIGN MINISTER BUI THANH SON

An Alan and Jane Batkin International Leaders Forum

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INTRODUCTION

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KEYNOTE SPEAKER

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MALONEY: Good morning and welcome, everyone, to the Falk Auditorium at the Brookings Institution. I'm Suzanne Maloney. I'm vice president and director of foreign policy here at Brookings. And I am tremendously pleased to welcome you all to our Alan and Jane Batkin International Leaders Forum, a Brookings series that features world leaders and senior officials for major policy discussions.

Today, we're truly honored to be joined by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam, Bui Thanh Son. Foreign Minister Son plays an important role- *pause for applause* -Foreign Minister Son plays a very important role in Vietnam's expanding relationship with the United States. In September 2023, the two countries elevated their relationship to a comprehensive strategic partnership. As part of this new status, both capitals established an annual dialogue between Vietnam's minister of foreign affairs and the US secretary of state to promote bilateral relations between the two countries and to discuss potential opportunities and challenges. Today's discussion here at Brookings will explore some of those opportunities and challenges, and will feature a robust examination of Vietnam's economic and security positioning within Southeast Asia and the broader Indo-Pacific region.

Allow me to provide a very brief introduction for Foreign Minister Son. The foreign minister began his very distinguished career with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1987, and he's held several prestigious positions within the ministry, including as chief negotiator for the Comprehensive Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between Vietnam and the European Union. His most recent position prior to his current post was as first vice minister of foreign affairs, the second in charge of the ministry.

My colleague Jonathan Stromseth, who is a nonresident senior fellow at the Brookings Foreign Policy program, as well as a professor of practice with the Sanford School of Public Affairs at Duke University, will moderate today's discussion. Thank you both for joining us here today. Foreign Minister Son will begin with some brief opening remarks before joining Jonathan in a moderated discussion. And finally, the event will conclude with a question and answer session for all those of you in the audience, both in person and virtually.

All of us at Brookings are grateful to Alan and Jane Batkin for their support of our International Leaders Forum, which has enabled us to hear from Foreign Minister Son today. Brookings supporters are very important in that they make our work possible, but they also respect the institution's commitment to independence, which is sacrosanct. As with all of our activities, the views expressed on the stage today are solely those of the speakers. As a reminder, we're on the record and this event is being live streamed. Online viewers may submit questions via email at events at Brookings Dot Edu, or via social media using the hashtag USVietnam. Foreign Minister, the floor is now yours.

SON: Thank you, Dr. Suzanne Maloney, vice president for the Brookings Institution. Ladies and gentlemen, first of all, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Maloney for her kind introduction. I also thank the Brookings Institution and all of you for giving me and my delegation a warm welcome. It is such a pleasure to be here at the Brookings, a prestigious think tank with a major role in policymaking process in the United States, including foreign policy. I know Brookings has over the years had a productive working relationship with research organizations in Vietnam, including the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam. A vivid example of that connection is my old friend, Dr. Johnathan Stromseth, who had worked in Vietnam before and has since promoted policies and scholar exchanges between the two countries. Jonathan, it is great to see you again, and please do not "grill me" over the hard questions after this.

Ladies and gentlemen, Vietnam's perspective I would like to present brief remarks on three major topics. First, on Vietnam's perspective on the world and region. And second, Vietnam's foreign policy and bamboo diplomacy. And our vision for Vietnam-U.S. comprehensive strategic partnership.

First on Vietnam's perspective on the world and our region. The world is undergoing dramatic and profound changes. Some unpredictable and unprecedented. Peace, cooperation and development remain the prevailing trend and common aspirations of all nations. Yet in certain parts of the world, especially in Europe and the Middle East and some in Asia, peace is being challenged most seriously since the end of the Cold War. The international community has to deal with multiple crises, including traditional and nontraditional security challenges and the confluence of them. Economically, the world is also facing strong headwinds, with the World Bank warning of its weakest half decade performance in global growth. On a brighter note, the Asia Indo-Pacific continues to be a dynamic area and the engine of the global economic growth. Last year, when Indonesia hosted its ASEAN chairmanship, the theme of the conference was ASEAN: Epicenter of Economic Growth. We also see that four of the world's biggest economies, namely the United States, China, Japan and India are located in this vibrant region. Since the end of the Cold War, our region has enjoyed longer peace than most other parts of the world. At present, at the heart of it is ASEAN, with a population of 670 million people, a combined GDP of 3500 billion U.S. dollars are playing a central role in evolving regional architecture. However, our region's peace, stability and prosperity cannot be taken for granted. This region has become a theater for strategic competition. Many potential flashpoints, such as the South China Sea or we call East Sea, and emerging nontraditional security challenges such as climate change, sea level rise, water security, aging population, digital divide, cybercrimes, etc. can easily unravel the hard earned socio-economic development of our region. Therefore, we hope that all countries, especially major powers, will act responsibly towards each other and for a better future of the region and the world at large. We believe that competition among major powers is natural, but conflict is not inevitable. In this connection, Vietnam welcomes the ongoing efforts to stabilize relations between the United States and China. We also encourage all the major powers to respect the fundamental principles of the United Nations charter, international law, and ASEAN centrality and the legitimate rights and interests of all countries in the region. Like many other countries in the region, Vietnam welcomes the United States' positive and constructive contributions to our shared peace and prosperity. We hope that the United States will further strengthen the economic pillar of the Indo-Pacific strategy, deepen the ASEAN-US comprehensive strategic partnership, respect ASEAN's centrality, and support ASEAN's outlook on the Indo-Pacific, we call AOIP. It takes two to tango, such that the United States matters for ASEAN and ASEAN matters for the United States.

Ladies and gentlemen, I will go to the second part of it, Vietnam's foreign policy and bamboo diplomacy. Despite many rapid challenges in the world, for us, one thing remains unchanged. That is Vietnam's foreign policy of independence, self-reliance, peace, friendship and cooperation, and multilateralization and diversification of external relations and proactive international integration. Vietnam is a reliable friend and partner and an active and responsible member of the international community. Our foreign policy aims at not only to serve our own national interests, but also making greater contribution to peace, cooperation and sustainable development in the region and the world. This represents the philosophy of Vietnam's bamboo diplomacy, namely, strong roots, sturdy stems, and flexible branches. Strong roots signify the tradition of independence, self-reliance for the interests of our nation state and for equality and mutual benefits between and among nations. Sturdy stems indicate the upholding of justice, humanity, faithfulness, and international law even at difficult times as we face today. Flexible branches means creativity in the conduct of foreign policy on the basis of understanding of ourselves and of our partners. In other words, it means perseverance in principles and flexibility in implementation. Nowhere does this resonate stronger than that, than in our relations with major powers. In 2023, Vietnam hosted both U.S. President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping for state visits, which means Vietnam wishes and can have good relations with all major powers. Thanks to Vietnam's bamboo diplomacy, we now have established strategic partnership with all of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council. To date, we have 30 - three-zero - strategic and comprehensive partnerships, and are the member of 16 FTAs, linking Vietnam with 60 economies in the world. All of that is to realize our strategic development goals at home. To make Vietnam a developing country with a modern industry and an upper middle-income level by 2030, and a developed country with a high-income status by 2045. To that end, in addition to our endeavor and our self-reliance, our self-efforts, Vietnam needs a peaceful, stable and favorable

external environment, and very importantly, the valuable cooperation and support from the international community and major partners, including the United States of America.

Now I turn to the third part, our vision for the Vietnam-U.S. comprehensive strategic partnership. As our General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong and many other Vietnamese leaders have stated, Vietnam considers the United States one of our leading partners. In retrospect, even the most optimistic people couldn't have imagined how far our two countries have gone from being former foes to friends and now comprehensive strategic partnership. I would like to quote President Joe Biden's remarks at the 78 UN General Assembly. Quote: "It would have been unthinkable for an American president to stand in Hanoi alongside a Vietnamese leader and announce a mutual commitment to the highest level of countries' partnership." End quote. Since the normalization of relations in 1995, every sitting U.S. president has visited Vietnam. General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong's visits to the United States in 2015 and President Joe Biden's state visit to Vietnam in 2023 are outstanding and historic events in our relationship. Our trade has increased 245 times, from a mere 450 million U.S. dollars in 1995, when we normalized relations, to now 110 billion U.S. dollars in 2023. Currently, there are about 30,000 Vietnamese students studying, and about 2.4 million overseas Vietnamese living in the United States, which serve as an important bridge for people-to-people ties. Although we still have differences, we have goodwill, frank and candid dialogues, like I have yesterday with National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, with the Secretary of State Antony Blinken, and later on with the administrator of USAID in the afternoon yesterday. That's to minimize them on the basis of mutual respect for independence, sovereignty and political systems, as mentioned in many Vietnam-U.S. joint statements. After so many ups and downs, the relationship between our two countries is now a model in international relations, especially for countries currently at war and in conflict. Last year, President Joe Biden's historic visit to Vietnam our country-... two countries met another major milestone by upgrading our relations to comprehensive strategic partnership for peace, cooperation, and sustainable development. It took nearly 80 years - eight zero - since President Ho Chi Minh's first letter to U.S. President Truman, and almost 30 years since the normalization of our relations to bring Vietnam-U.S. to where we are today. This reaffirms the fact that we cannot change the past, but we can change and make the future.

Looking forward, we have strong determination to work closely with the United States to deepen our CSP in the following directions. First, strengthened political trust. Both countries should continue to promote high level exchanges, respect each other's political systems, and maintain regular dialogues. Our American friends and partners often say, a strong, independent, resilient and prosperous Vietnam is in the interest of the United States. We look forward to stronger actions by the U.S. To realize this commitment. Second, boost our economic trade and investment cooperation, which is the driving force for our CSP. We should focus on supply chain resilience, infrastructure connectivity, digital economy, energy, green economy, and logistics. We hope that the United States will soon recognize Vietnam's market economy status. And we expect that the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for prosperity, IPEF, will be open, inclusive, ensuring the needs and interests of all participants, especially in bridging the development gap and promoting the digital transformation and sustainable development in the region. Third, promote cooperation in science and technology and innovation. In particular, we attach great importance to the semiconductor ecosystems, critical minerals, and artificial intelligence. In tandem with trade and economic ties, our cooperation in this area can elevate Vietnam's position in the regional and global value chain, which also benefits the United States and other partners. Fourth, strengthen our people-to-people ties. This is the sustainable foundation for our CSP. With support, robust cultural exchanges, educational and training, cooperation and hope that the United States will extend greater assistance to high quality human resource development for Vietnam. And fifth, coordinate more closely with the framework of multilateral forum, which, as such as ASEAN, United Nations, APEC, Mekong-U.S. partnership, etc. With a strong belief in the power of multilateralism, Vietnam is ready to work with the United States and other partners to address transnational and global issues like climate change, food security, health security, anti-terrorism and non-proliferation.

Ladies and gentlemen, if history is any-... an indicator, whenever Vietnam has good relations with U.S., it is not only benefits each of our respective countries, but also serves the shared interests of peace and prosperity in our region and beyond. I strongly believe that the elevation of the Vietnam-U.S. relations to CSP has opened up remarkable opportunities for our two countries. It's also high time that we would redouble our efforts to speed up the implementation of the CSP in all areas, thereby serving the interests of our people and making positive contributions to peace, stability and prosperity in the Asia Indo-Pacific region and the world. Thank you for your attention and now I'm open to your comments and questions. Thank you.

STROMSETH: Well, thank you very much, Minister Son. And, it's great to see you again. After a few years.

SON: Yeah, thank you. It's great to see you again here, also in DC and that, in this prestigious Brookings Institution.

STROMSETH: So, we have, an opportunity here first to, delve into your really sweeping and thoughtful remarks, and also have an opportunity to, after we have a conversation -- thank you -- engage with the audience, both our virtual audience, and the audience here in the room. We had the opportunity to get to know each other something like 30 years ago when we were much younger. And I think I was setting up an office of the Asia Foundation and you were in Hanoi, and you were, then deputy director of IIR, the Institute of International Relations, now the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam. We developed some conferences on the domestic sources of foreign policy and how that would affect the relationship. Also, how international factors would affect the relationship. A lot has happened since normalization in '95. And I think one signpost is the comprehensive partnership in 2013. I think after that was created, there were quiet discussions about upgrading to a comprehensive strategic partnership. But it took some time. And I wanted to ask, I think the conventional wisdom in Washington was that, maybe the Vietnamese weren't quite ready. Why did the Vietnamese choose, you as foreign minister and others, to elevate the relationship with the United States late last year?

SON: First I have to thank Jonathan Stromseth, an old friend of me, myself, and an old friend of Vietnam. I think Jonathan has been in Vietnam even before the normalization of relations in 1945 [*sic*, 1995]. We were one, among friends in America, and among friends in Vietnam to work together for the promotion and normalization of our relations. And yesterday, I also met with some other friends who also have made a lot of efforts and contributions to our normalization back more than 30, roughly 30 years back. So, thank you again for your early coming to Vietnam and also your contributions to our bilateral relations. Secondly, I want to share with you that Vietnam and the Americas, we have gone through, to through a long journey, as you say. You see, we have at war for quite a long time. And after the war, when Vietnam helped the Cambodian people to cope with the genocide regime like Pol Pot, Ieng Sary. But again, at that time, the international community and American friends here, even still did not understand, why the reason? But last year, Cambodian prime minister said, now with court and trial of Pol Pot history, then Vietnam's was really, I mean, make, really humanitarian gesture of helping the Cambodians to overcome the genocide regime back, 40 years back. So I think from that war and then misunderstanding each other for quite some time, we entered normalizations and 30 years after that, in 1995, and then in 2013, we established a comprehensive partnership, as Jonathan has mentioned. I think up to now, next year, we would celebrate 30 years of our comprehensive-... of our normalization process. And we see, looking back, as I said in my remarks at the beginning, we started from humanitarian gestures and cooperation, like helping the Americans to bring back MIA to America. And now this process is still going on. But the first, I mean, cooperation between the two countries was on MIA. But after that, then we expanded our cooperation to all other areas, especially in trade. In 2000, we signed the BTA, that was a landmark.

STROMSETH: The bilateral trade agreement.

SON: BTA, bilateral trade agreements, and then the trade between the two countries increased very fast. In that sense, America also removed Vietnam from the list, Enemy Trading Act. And then you also put us in the BTF in order to promote bilateral relations, cooperation in other areas like people-to-people exchange, educational exchange, investments have also boomed. And more importantly, the mutual understanding, mutual trust has increased. And I think in 2013, the two leaders, President Joe Biden and our general secretary, hosted the state visit of President Joe Biden to Hanoi. And we elevated our relationship to comprehensive strategic partnership. There are two meanings in it. One is that we have come to a mature stage of turning from former foes to friends in 19-- 2013, when we established a comprehensive partnership and now through mutual trust to CSP. So mutual trust understanding between the two nations are high. Second is that cooperation are now expanding to all areas cover, as when we still identify trade, investment, science and technology, innovation, etc., would be the main driver of our cooperation. And we also expand to our cooperation to other new areas like energy transition and especially the building of ecosystems of semiconductors in Vietnam. This is a remarkable process.

STROMSETH: Yeah. Thank you. I'd love to come back to this and look at how we can build out the scaffolding of the CSP, or our comprehensive strategic partnership, going forward. But I wanted to ask, maybe a broader contextual question, about geopolitics in Southeast Asia. It seems to me that there's kind of two schools of thought today that aren't necessarily mutually exclusive. One is that increasing U.S.-China competition is sort of creating an impossible choice for countries in the region who may be forced to choose between Beijing and Washington. Yet I think there's also a sense that Vietnam is doing quite well in this context. It has many suitors. It's hosted President Xi, President Biden, and perhaps is hedging, in political science terms, you know, to secure benefits from rival camps. The other school of thought, I think, is that, there's a growing multipolarity in Southeast Asia, and the region is, is moving beyond the need for a binary choice. And this also seems consistent with Vietnamese foreign policy. After all. I think if I'm right, you've also just upgraded relations with Japan and Australia. This is perhaps a question more for an analyst than a foreign minister, but, you've played both roles in your career, and I was wondering if you can give your thoughts on this geopolitical context and how Vietnam sees it in the formulation of their foreign policy.

SON: Thank you. I, as I requested to you at the beginning that you do not "grill me" over your hard questions *laughter* but again, this is a real politics. We, as I say, we see, the global situation now characterized by the most outstanding issue is competition among major powers. This is a real sense. We also see that the main trend of the international situation is that peace, stability, are still the aspirations of all nations. And the competition among major powers is natural. But we can manage that, and other countries can contribute to the hard-won peace and stability that our mankind has achieved so far. Vietnam, we have gone through many years of wars. We understand and we treasured how peace and stability is valuable for not only for Vietnamese people, but for the whole region and the world. So in that sense, we, as I said to you, conduct a foreign policy of peace, stability, cooperation, and independence. Together with multilateralization and diversification of our foreign relations, we would show our sincerity and our earnest aspirations for peace and stability. So in that sense, we have good and we are reliable and trusted friends of all nations. And in that sense, as I said to you last year, we elevated our relationship not only with the United States, but with China. We also elevated our relationship to our shared future of strategic significance. And we also elevated our relationship with Japan and most recently with Australia. And we have continued to elevate our relationship with other countries in the region and the world. What we do is that from our hard-won peace and stability, we want to contribute and we want to be a responsible member of the international community. We want to have and contribute to have a stabilized relationship among major powers. Competition continues to grow, but it can be managed. And they can, can cooperate with each other not only to address the global issues like climate change, like cybersecurity, pandemic diseases, etc. That can be the common goals of us, and we can work together to promote peace and stability and prosperity of all countries.

STROMSETH: Well, it does seem like, what you described sounds very much like a manifestation of bamboo diplomacy. Yeah. And, I have a question about that. I'm teaching a

course at Duke University, currently. And we're looking at how developing countries are navigating U.S.-China rivalry, particularly in the foreign aid and development space. And the students are giving presentations and even writing papers on Vietnam. And we had a discussion about bamboo diplomacy. And one of the students said, you know, bamboo still breaks if the tension is really high. And I wanted to ask, with an eye to that, what destabilizing factors, potential sources of conflict do you really worry about, that could lead to that sort of outcome? Obviously, there's a lot of tension in the South China Sea as we speak, between China and the Philippines, that are sparking some concern of, you know, conflict between the US and China more directly. So I'm just wondering what are your biggest worries in the region?

SON: Yeah. So bamboo diplomacy, as I described in my remarks earlier, why we call bamboo - Vietnam's bamboo policy – is because bamboo has been associated with Vietnam these long, long, long, long ago. For the Vietnamese, we use bamboo not only to defend our country, but also use bamboo to develop our country. And in that sense, the philosophy of bamboo policy has three dimensions. With roots, must be strong. Roots, here, it means the principles that we must keep and attach to. Then stem must be sturdy. Sturdy stems, here, it relates to our philosophy and traditional, foreign, thoughts on foreign policy. That is faithfulness. That is sincerity. That is to uphold the principles of international law, especially UN charter. In that, this is the basis that we would conduct our foreign policy in a very flexible manner. That is, we call branches, flexible branches. It means when we look at particular partners we would understand how the strength, the difficulties of each other, of each of our respective partners. And then we would have define our own policies towards that partner. So in that sense, we, I think we, now we, I see, I agree with you that we are facing with many multiple challenges, but among this one would be the most difficult one, is how to manage among the major powers competition. And the conflicts can take place anytime, anywhere, if we don't have a flexible, skillful foreign policy to manage it. Vietnam, we would work our best or make our most efforts to be the responsible member of the international community. We would, I mean, have reliable friends, I mean, trusted friends in order to promote our bilateral relations and also to contribute to the hard-won peace and also stability of the world and the region so that all of us can prosperous.

STROMSETH: Well, let's turn, back to the comprehensive strategic partnership and how we can build out the scaffolding. You mentioned, the importance of science and technology and semiconductors. That strikes me as a very fruitful area where the United States wants to help, wants to diversify its supply chains, and Vietnam wants to develop its own domestic industry in that area. Another area that I know was highlighted in the joint statement, for the -- or the fact sheet -- for the CSP, was cooperation on climate change. And, I know that the United States is involved in the Just Energy Transition Partnership efforts, a \$15.5 billion effort, if I'm right, to support the energy transition in Vietnam. And there's also bilateral initiatives with USAID, and I know you mentioned that you met with the administrator, Samantha Power. Could you tell us a little bit more about the climate challenges in Vietnam, and how the United States and Vietnam could cooperate in that area?

SON: Yes. I think, CSP has defined two elements I would like to sum up. One is that we would consider trade, investment, and innovation, science and technology, education as the driving force of our relationship for a long time to come. And the second we identify semiconductors industry as the breakthrough in our relationship in the future. Actually Vietnam joins the ecosystem of semiconductors later than many of our partners in the world. So that's why the coming of two of us, Vietnam-US, in building ecosystems of semiconductors and chips would help Vietnam in the process to increase its ladder in the ladder value chains in the world, and also helps us in the process of modernization of the country. As I said that our aim by 2030 would be the modernized countries with upper middle income by 2030. This can do only by finding some breakthrough in our process of modernization of the country. And semiconductors would be that, that's it. But at the same time, we also take care of the issue of climate change, as I say. Climate change, Vietnam is very much affected. And according to World Bank, as you said, one of the five countries most affected by climate change. Currently -- and yesterday I talked with administrator Samantha Power of USAID. She also had a visit to the Mekong Delta, and we was very much agreed in a common

observation that Mekong Delta is now most affected by climate change, because sea level, sea rising level has made a sort of intrusion into most parts provinces of Mekong Delta, which now hosted 20 million people population and the main place for growing rice and also providing food security, not only for Vietnam but for the world, as well. Why I say that? Because last year, even in the difficult time, we exported eight millions of rice, 8 million tons of rice to the world in order to contribute to the process of food security. But that, all that is now changing because of the climate change. And water, transnational water management. So we are now working with United States. In order to have the plans, concrete plans to help Vietnam to adapt to this new situation. For example, we are now talking about projects to have Vietnam in agricultural adaptation, not only to cope with the climate change by finding new types of seeds of rice. Before we use natural water from Mekong River, but now, with the intrusion of sea levels, we have to use different types of seeds to grow rice in the Mekong Delta. But at the same time, Mekong Delta would be the region that can supply the whole, I mean, rice for our population in Vietnam and also the world, as I mentioned about. So I think this project would be very important for us in the future.

STROMSETH: Yeah. Another aspect, as I understand it, the comprehensive strategic partnership is coordination on regional and global issues like climate change. And I wanted to ask, I think many years ago, maybe 20 years ago, you and I participated in a trilateral conference involving, the U.S., Vietnam and China, maybe a couple of conferences. Fast forward today, and U.S.-China competition and rivalry is at a whole new level. As the U.S. and Vietnam thinks about cooperation on global issues like, like climate change or public health, and what have you, do you think such a dialogue, such a discussion, a trilateral discussion between China and the U.S. and Vietnam, is possible? The U.S. and China are at least talking again about climate change. They've resumed an official dialogue. Is there some possibility of, trilateral work in this area involving Vietnam?

SON: I have to say that I appreciate it very much, creative thinking of Jonathan. I think 30 years ago, back when we first think of the trilateral cooperation between U.S., Vietnam, and China, the context of that time was different. At that time, we only normalized relations with U.S., and four years earlier, we also normalized relations with China. When Jonathan raised that idea, I was at the Institute of International Relations. I thought that it was difficult. But that's more for the part of Vietnam. But now the context is different. The two of you are in very much competition. It's now for the part of Vietnam, we can contribute. So I think this idea is creative, but also can be feasible in the two senses. One is that, this is, we choose a very common basis, common interest, issue of common interest, for us to cooperate. That is climate change. All countries -- this is a global issue. All countries have to cooperate to address this issue. So three of us can cooperate; it's normal. Second is that, though between you, there are some difficulties. But I think that you also reach a common understanding that U.S., China would work together to address the issue. And Vietnam is in particular position that now we can contribute to stabilize the relationship between the U.S. and China in the future. If that idea can be realized, I think it's good.

STROMSETH: Before we open up to questions, I do want to address one issue, because it's very much been in the newspapers the last 3 or 4 days. Vietnamese domestic politics has been covered because of the resignation of one of your top leaders, the president. You know, investors, foreign investors are always looking for stability. What should they be thinking right now?

SON: It's also hard question, but again, I can say that, as you see in Vietnam, the campaign for anti-corruption has been going on and it is welcomed by the international community, including the businesses. We are now working very hard to create the most favorable conditions for international businesses to come and work in Vietnam profitably. The resignation of the president, I think in Vietnam has not affect our foreign policy as well as our own policies of economic development. Why I say so? Because in Vietnam, if you look at the situation in Vietnam, we have a collective leadership. We have collective foreign policy. We have collective decided economic path development. So every five years you would have a party congress. The last one was in 2021. We set out the strategy for economic development until 2030. And with vision until 2045, all the areas would include the economic growth and economic environments for domestic

as well as international businesses to invest and do business in Vietnam. And I think 1 or 2, I mean, figures in the leadership have resigned, that's not changing the situation. And we would continue to have collective leadership, collective decision, and also move our relationship, bilateral relationship forward and also create the most favorable conditions for international businesses to come. Only last week, before I depart here for the visit, our prime minister received a big delegation from USAID -- USABC, sorry, ASEAN-U.S. Business Council -- visited to Vietnam. This is the biggest U.S. delegation of businesses, big businesses came to Vietnam. The same questions and most questions, including issues of bureaucracy, including issues of difficulties in getting the licenses, difficulties in implementing ODA projects, etc. And all were addressed by the ministers attended the meeting and also by our prime minister. The commitment is there. If we want to move forwards, we would have to create a good and favorable environment not only for domestic business, but international investors to come and do business in Vietnam.

STROMSETH: Well, we only have about 5 or 6 minutes left, and I have to get to the audience. First, I want to take one question from the virtual audience. And you had spoken in your presen--

SON: Which?

STROMSETH: Oh, I'll. Yeah, it's, come to us online where I think we have a very large virtual audience with us. And you had talked about people-to-people relations. There's a question from Linda Yarr -- I'm going to put two together here -- of George Washington University, and she said, what should the role be of joint academic research and scholarly exchange in solidifying relations between our two countries? A related question from Andrew Pham of the University of Las Vegas: does the speaker see international Vietnamese students who are currently studying in the U.S. playing a role in facilitating the elevated relationship? You can take either one of those.

SON: As I said, the process of normalization and, promotion of bilateral relations has mobilized the support and contributions from different circles, different status, both Americans and Vietnam. Academia is one of the main driving force in, in our, normalization and also promotion of our bilateral relations. Like you came to us more than 30 years back, and creative ideas. At that time, I remember a group of professors at Columbia and other universities in the U.S. worked together on defining, on how we can normalize relations and how we can move our relationship forward. And now I think it's more than that. We still need and treasured the contributions from academia, both countries, on creating and define how we can move and deepen and implement our CSP more effectively to bring benefits to both peoples. And now the younger generations is students, I said to you, 30,000 Vietnamese are studying in the US. They would be the bridge of our relationship in the future. And currently they are also a good human resource to help us in the process of development. I have to say, for example, we have a network of all the students working in science and technology in America. We have globally network, but in America there are big students engaged in science and technology. And we, they have a network with inside Vietnam, students inside Vietnam, and they consult with each other regularly. And I think the network would help us to promote our cooperation not only in science and technology, but also our mutual understanding, helping us to bring the relationship to a higher level, even, I don't know how we can devise, after a CSP, another framework. It would be higher in the next 50 years.

STROMSETH: Over there. John? Yeah.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Mr. Son, my name is John. Oh. Thank you. Thank you, Jonathan. Foreign Minister Son, my name is John Brandon. I'm with the Asia Foundation here in Washington. We've met before.

SON: Yes, you look familiar with me.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Yes, just more gray hair. But the, thank you for your remarks. You know, you talked about the economic relationship between the United States and Vietnam, and it's

indeed been remarkable from, you know, a few 3 or \$400 million, you know, when the, with the time of the bilateral trade agreement and now, you know, over, more than \$110 billion, I believe. And you talked about issues that were important to IPEF and Vietnam, you know, resilient supply chains, energy transition, digital economy. In less than ten months, the United States is going to be a, have a policy where, through IPEF looking at greater economic cooperation in the region where the United States, Vietnam, and other countries will play an important role. Or it could be a return to more protectionist sentiment, depending on our election in November. I was wondering how you would think that Vietnam would handle these challenging waters if it were to become the latter as opposed to the former. And again, it's nice to see you. Thank you very much.

SON: A very good question, but relates more economic issue, but I have to say that it's also more political. This sense: that, we, for our parts and many countries see multilateralism and also free trade, within the framework of the WTO, is still the main driving force of our cooperation. And in that sense, we welcome the initiative of the America's IPEF, Indo-Pacific Economic cooperation [*sic*] Framework. Why? Because we are come because it would create a stable supply chain, a stable manufacturing chains and also create good conditions, environments for cooperation. There are two elements that Vietnam contributed to this process, is that IPEF should be open to all countries. Second, IPEF should be inclusive, that is to include more countries in the process. So that's why we participated actively in the discussions on IPEF and I think if this one is achieved, then would create good conditions for not only Vietnam and U.S., but all members IPEF., to work in good environments for our cooperation. Whether it is changed or not, it depends very much, but again, international regimes, when it came, and when it comes into being, it's really contributions and efforts of all countries, not one single country. And I think there should be a good foundation for us to continue to promote in the future, whether it is changed by any political factors.

STROMSETH: Thank you. Well, I'm sorry I went on too long, so we're going to have to close down. But it's been, let me join Suzanne in saying it's been such an honor to be able to host you. I've known you as an intellectual and analyst and now a minister. I think of you as a, a minister-intellectual, I think. It's been great to reengage. Please join me in thanking, Minister Son.

SON: Thank you. I want to say that, thank you. Jonathan. Thank you, Vice President Suzanne, for this opportunity. And I know that you still have some or many questions, much to ask and exchange. But again, I also address in my initial and opening remarks. And if anything, we can exchange further. This is the Brookings Institution would be the bridge for us. You can connect or contact with us in the future to address other or exchange on other issues. As I say, academic exchange would help us a lot. Helps not only the politicians, but helps the businesses to find a good way to promote our bilateral cooperation.

STROMSETH: I think those are great remarks to end on. Let me ask everybody here in the audience to please stay seated while Foreign Minister Son and his delegation exits the building. It will just take a moment or two. And we'll let you know when everybody can exit.

SON: Thank you again.