



## WHY VIETNAM IS MORE THAN JUST A VENUE FOR THE UNITED STATES AND DPRK SUMMIT: A VIEW FROM HANOI

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The world's attention again focuses on Vietnam after the country's successful hosting of APEC 2017. The highly anticipated summit between the United States President Donald Trump and the Chairman of Democratic People's Republic of Korea Kim Jong Un in Hanoi from Feb. 27-28, 2019 accentuates the fact that Vietnam can be a host for important international events. Last year, the WEF-ASEAN forum in Vietnam was praised by WEF founder Klaus Schwab as the "most successful event" of its kind in the 27-year history of the forum. Yet, a closer look at Vietnam's international capabilities would reveal that the country is not limiting itself to its convening or hosting events. Beyond that, Vietnam has showcased to the world its new abilities in making contributions to regional and world peace and stability.

### **Comprehensive international integration**

Since 2011, Vietnam has embarked on a foreign policy of comprehensive international integration. The word "comprehensive" means Vietnam is ready to cooperate with the international community in all fields. After three decades of opening the country for economic and trade exchanges, Vietnam has begun pushing for joint efforts to ensure peace and security

beyond its borders. Last October, after reaching a deal with the United Nations, Vietnam sent its first field hospital to South Sudan. Vietnam supports the denuclearization process on the Korean Peninsula. In July 2013, in collaboration with Russia and the US, Hanoi removed the highly enriched uranium research reactor fuel to follow through on its commitments with IAEA. Before the Trump-Kim summit, Vietnam Deputy Foreign Minister Nguyen Quoc Dzung as a special envoy of Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc visited Myanmar, where he offered \$100,000 for humanitarian aid, reconstruction, and development in Rakhine State, saying Vietnam is willing to support dialogues among relevant parties, contributing to peace and stability in the region.

### **Peace-making initiative and reconciliation**

Vietnam's more active role in proposing initiatives such as reconciliation between conflicting parties has grown over the past two years. Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc vowed to "do our best to facilitate the meeting" between President Trump and Chairman Kim. Earlier, Vietnam was also reportedly chosen to host a secret Japan-DPRK meeting to discuss the return of Japanese abductees.

According to the international media, Vietnam itself is also a model for reconciliation. After 20 years of being divided by war, Vietnam formally reunified in 1975, but differences remained between those who followed the Saigon regime and people in the North. Vietnam, however, did not rest on its laurels and soon focused on national reconciliation, political integration, and nation building. Now, by hosting the Trump-Kim summit, Vietnam wants to carry the message of tolerance and reconciliation, which is critical not only to the US and DPRK, but to the whole world. Directive No. 25, issued by the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Communist Party last August, promoted the idea of Vietnam's reconciliation and peace-making diplomacy.

**Not just a venue**

Unlike the first summit, which was more about icebreaking between the two sides, this time both the US and the DPRK have expressed hope that they want substantial outcomes. Vietnam was chosen as the venue because it fits with the US thinking that Pyongyang may find Vietnam a model; Chairman Kim himself noted the same thing last year. Recent media analyses suggest that the DPRK can learn from Vietnam's experience via the *Doi Moi* policy and the fast turnaround in Vietnam-US relations after normalization in 1995.

On the first account, Vietnam could serve as a vivid example to rejuvenate the economy and open up the country. Vietnam was in a similar situation from 1975 to 1994 when it suffered through a serious trade embargo. In 1986, Vietnam decided to launch free market economic reforms, or *Doi Moi*. As a result, its GDP per capita increased more than 24 times in 29 years from \$95 in 1989 to \$2,342 in 2017. By 2045, when Vietnam celebrates 100 years of independence, the country's GDP per capita is predicted to reach \$18,000. Significantly, the DPRK could realize the same achievement with the help from its southern brother – the Republic of Korea – if it can seize the present opportunity.

On the second account, the comprehensive partnership between Vietnam and the US, which was established in 2013, proved how close two former foes could become if both sides are ready to move on. To reach this height in their relationship, mutual trust was built over many years of cooperation through the POW/MIA program, developing economic linkages, growing security contacts, and respecting each other's political system. Thanks to their joint efforts, Vietnam and the US now have a solid foundation to move toward building a closer partnership in the future.

There is no doubt that Chairman Kim is trying to solve a long-enduring puzzle: nuclear capability, or

development, or both. The world is much different from his father's time. Today economics and technology, not just military prowess, are the primary sources of national power. Wars and conflicts are too costly and deadly for nations to afford. Hanoi thus may be another critical venue for Kim to decide whether the DPRK could become the next Asian powerhouse.

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