

VIETNAM 2025: TÔ LÂM'S POWERPLAY AND THE LIMITS OF BAMBOO  
DIPLOMACY

*Fabio Figiaconi*

LOEWE Research Group “World Orders in Conflict”, Goethe University  
Frankfurt  
figiaconi@em.uni-frankfurt.de

*The present article analyses the main developments that have taken place in Vietnam in the year 2025 in the areas of domestic politics, economic and trade affairs, and international relations. When it comes to domestic affairs, one figure has dominated the scene: Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV)'s General Secretary Tô Lâm. Immediately after his appointment as CPV leader in August 2024 following the passing of his predecessor, Nguyễn Phú Trọng, Tô Lâm launched a series of comprehensive and radical reforms aimed at simplifying the country's administrative machinery and fully unlocking its economic potential. In addition, the reorganization served to consolidate his hold on power in the run-up to the 14th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam, held in early 2026, where he was confirmed as General Secretary for another term. When it comes to the economic sector, in 2025 Vietnam has again registered a solid growth, notwithstanding the trade turbulences triggered by the Trump Administration's tariffs war. Finally, when it comes to foreign affairs, Vietnam has kept its active non-aligned behaviour, known as «bamboo diplomacy», in place, entertaining parallel relations with the United States, Russia, China, and other regional players. However, against the backdrop of accentuated great power tensions and a more complex regional and global environment, there is now the concrete risk that such a strategic approach may be on the verge of reaching its structural limits.*

KEYWORDS - Tô Lâm; Communist Party of Vietnam's 14th National Congress; New Doi Moi; New Era of National Rise; Trump Administration's Tariffs War; Chinese Transshipment; Limits of Bamboo Diplomacy

## 1. *Introduction*

The year 2025 has been particularly eventful for Vietnam. Internally, the country has witnessed the power consolidation of the Communist Party of Vietnam's (CPV) General Secretary Tô Lâm, who acceded to power in mid-2024. Since then, he relentlessly pursued the reinforcement of his position via a series of sweeping reforms, which have interested the country's governmental structure, provincial organization, judiciary, and military, as well as some of the CPV's main organs. Such extensive measures served to reduce administrative bottlenecks and to try to accelerate economic growth and, in parallel, to prepare the terrain for the 14th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam, held in January 2026, where Tô Lâm was reconfirmed at the helm of the CPV. On the economic front, the country managed to weather the storm of the U.S. Trump Administration's tariffs war. Despite having been initially slapped with a 46% tariffs rate (one of the highest imposed globally by the United States), after long negotiations the Vietnamese leadership managed to reach a framework agreement which, if eventually implemented, would see the tariffs rate descend to 20%. At the same time, General Secretary Tô Lâm's policy activism also interested the economic sphere, where he launched reforms and set ambitious goals with the aim of consolidating Vietnam's economic trajectory for the coming decades. In the meantime, the year 2025 has also been one of robust economic progress for the country, with a 8% GDP growth. Finally, in the conduct of external relations, the country continued its longstanding «bamboo diplomacy», consisting of engaging multiple great powers at the same time and in multiple areas. However, given the ever-complexifying geo-strategic environment at the regional and global level and the rise of great power frictions, it remains to be seen whether and for how long structural conditions will remain conducive for Vietnam to keep pursuing such a multi-pronged foreign policy without a risk of backlash.

## 2. *Domestic Affairs*

### 2.1. *The «power consolidation through reforms» of the Communist Party of Vietnam's General Secretary Tô Lâm ahead of the 14th CPV National Congress*

The most important internal political development in Vietnam in the year 2025 was the consolidation of authority over the country and the Party by the Communist Party of Vietnam's General Secretary Tô Lâm. Tô Lâm was appointed as the leader of CPV in August 2024, after the death of the previous

longstanding and all-powerful General Secretary Nguyễn Phú Trọng. His nomination came at the end of an unprecedented period of internal political turmoil for Vietnam, which saw the ousting of two Presidents of the country in 2023 and 2024, as well as the removal of numerous other prominent political figures who were allegedly involved in corruption activities and graft scandals [Quang-Anh Tran 2025; Reuters 2024, 26 August]. The downfall of such high-ranking officials was to be linked to the «blazing furnace» anti-corruption campaign, launched by Tô Lâm's aforementioned predecessor Nguyễn Phú Trọng both as a way to stop deeply entrenched malpractices and, especially, to punish rival factions and double down on his control over the CPV [Nguyen 2023]. Following Trọng's passing, Tô Lâm's rise to the CPV's General Secretariat has marked a crucial turning point in Vietnam's political scene, representing a first step in the direction of political stability. In fact, his central involvement as the former Minister for State Security in the execution of the «blazing furnace» campaign has provided Tô Lâm with substantial political capital, visibility, and leverage over his potential adversaries [Hutt 2024, 23 August]. On the other hand, however, as remarked by some scholars, his rise brought along the necessity to consolidate his legitimacy as Vietnam's leading figure by showcasing political resolve and delivering concrete results [Phan 2025, 31 January].

Indeed, just a few months after his accession to power, Tô Lâm started the process to set in motion a series of radical and long-ranging governmental and administrative reforms, which some analysts have dubbed a «second Doi Moi» [The Economist 2025, 22 May]. At the governmental level, in February 2025 the National Assembly voted in favour of a Resolution to restructure the governmental apparatus and augment its bureaucratic efficiency [Anh 2025, 19 February]. Under such administrative reform, for instance, Vietnam's ministries have now been reduced from 18 to 14, and a similar redundancy-reduction exercise has affected a number of government-affiliated agencies [Lin et al. 2025, 8 July]. Similarly, the CPV itself is also undergoing substantial restructuring, with some of its Commissions that will be merged and others, like the Commission for External Affairs, that are due to be suppressed altogether [Nguyen 2025]. Finally, the country's military and judiciary have also been subject to major reforms [Vietnam News 2025, 20 February; Vu and Nguyen 2025, 1 July]. At the administrative level, in July 2025 a sweeping reform redrawing Vietnam's administrative map entered into force, consolidating the country's 63 provinces into just 34 provinces and municipalities. Plus, it eliminated the intermediate administrative «district» level, effectively passing from a three-tier to a two-tier governance model [Agroberichten Buitenland 2025, 10 September]. Such restructuring is expected to reduce province-level officials

by around 130,000 units, for a total saving of approximately US\$ 7.3 billion between 2026 and 2030 [VnExpress International 2025, 11 June].

On the one hand, such initiatives have been motivated by a genuine desire to cut bureaucratic red tape, streamline the public administration, and increase the Government's capacity to act swiftly and more effectively [Truong 2025, 9 July]. On the other hand, they are a way for Tô Lâm to tighten his control over the CPV's cadres; for example, as observed by Abuza in an interview, «A 46% reduction in provincial party chiefs gives Tô Lâm incredible power — he can choose loyalists» [as reported in: Hutt 2025, 5 March]. Ultimately, the General Secretary's reform push has been functional to reinforce his newfound leadership position ahead of the 14th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam, held in January 2026. Such gatherings are the key rites of passage where the CPV and the country's political equilibria for the following five years are decided. In this context, thanks to the political activism and tactical manoeuvring that characterized his first one and a half years in power, Tô Lâm managed to be reconfirmed by the National Congress as the CPV's General Secretary for the next *lustrum* and, also, was appointed as the country's President [Cave and Ngo 2026, 10 February]. Such a concentration of key political roles in the hands of a single figure, uncommon in a country with a track record of collective leadership like Vietnam's, *de facto* makes him one of the most powerful Vietnamese leaders in the last decades.

Next to Tô Lâm's powerplay, the year 2025 registered two important historical anniversaries for Vietnam. First, the 30<sup>th</sup> of April 2025 marked the 50th anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War and the subsequent national reunification. The conflict, which lasted from the French ousting from the country in 1954 up to the fall of Saigon to North Vietnamese forces in 1975, devastated Vietnam and caused between 1 and 3 million casualties, depending on various estimates [Deutsche Welle 2025, 30 April; Nguyen and Miller 2024]. In the official speech held at the commemorative ceremony, the CPV's General Secretary Tô Lâm took the occasion to take stock of the country's economic and international achievements and set some broad future goals in line with his reform agenda [Vietnam Plus 2025, 30 April]. Second, the year 2025 also marked the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the August Revolution, when in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, the Việt Minh Front's forces seized power and proclaimed Vietnam's independence, before being forced to relinquish control by the intervention of the Allied powers [Marr 2013]. In this case too, the celebrations have been used as a stage to project political messaging about Vietnam's priorities on the international stage, as evidenced for instance by Tô Lâm's mentions during his speech about the necessity to respect international law and the United Nations Charter and the country's firm belief in resolving disputes by

peaceful means [Asia News Network 2025, 3 September]. Coming at an inflection point in Vietnam's politics, such important anniversaries have thus been instrumental to celebrate and showcase the country's successful development track-record under the CPV's guidance and to project, both internally and externally, an image of growing political confidence, strength, and stability.

### 3. *Economics*

#### 3.1. *Continued economic growth notwithstanding the Trump Administration's «tariffs war»*

Tô Lâm's wide-ranging reforms have also been directed towards the economic sector. Just days after his accession to the CPV's top spot in August 2024, he unveiled his idea that Vietnam was entering into a «new era of national rise». Such a vision is anchored into two ambitious economic objectives, i.e. «attaining upper middle-income status by 2030, which coincides with the CPV's centennial» and «reaching high-income status by 2045, when the Socialist Republic of Vietnam celebrates its 100th anniversary» [Phan 2025, 31 January]. In the quest to achieve the said goals, the years between 2024 and 2030 have been deemed as the crucial «sprint period» [Phan 2025, 31 January]. To pave the way for these ambitious targets, numerous measures were approved between the end of 2024 and 2025. First, important construction projects related to railways, nuclear power plants and port infrastructures, which had been slowed down due to the consequences of the afore-quoted «blazing furnace» anti-corruption investigations, have now been restarted, with a view to improving the country's logistical capacity and ameliorating its position as a hub in regional supply chains [Phan 2025, 23 April]. Second, the development of science and technology, innovation and digital transformation has now been identified as a strategic priority to foster Vietnam's growth. In line with this, in November it was announced that the state budget spent on science and technology accounted to 3% of GDP in 2025, up by more than one percentage point in comparison to 2024 [Government of Vietnam, 2025, 21 November]. Finally, in May, Vietnam's National Assembly passed a Resolution to ease regulatory constraints affecting the private sector, in an attempt to unlock its untapped economic potential [The Economist 2025, 12 November].

All in all, much time will be needed to observe how these reform initiatives will unfold and to fully appreciate their long-term effects. Yet, it is possible to argue that the stimulus stemming from such policy activism has already had some positive spillovers on Vietnam's economy. To be sure, the

target set in February 2025 in a Resolution by the National Assembly to reach 10% of GDP growth on an annual basis for the years between 2026 and 2030 appears to be somewhat unrealistic [Le and Nguyen 2025, 26 June]. This *caveat* notwithstanding, the year 2025 has been one of economic upswing for the country. According to the National Statistics Office, Vietnam's GDP increased by 8.02% year-on-year [National Statistics Office of Vietnam 2026, 5 January]. In particular, it has been the industrial sector that has driven such economic expansion [Nguyen Hanh 2025, 11 November]. Also when it comes to FDI inflows the numbers are positive, with a total of US\$ 38.4 billion registered in 2025 [Nguyen Hanh 2026, 22 January].

Crucially, this robust economic outlook has been achieved despite the headwinds originating from the imposition of import duties on the part of the Trump Administration. During the so-called «Liberation Day» on 2 April 2025, U.S. President Donald Trump announced a round of tariffs against a large group of countries accused of having profited from trade with the United States [Harithas et al. 2025, 3 April]. In this context, a 46% tariff was imposed on Vietnamese exports entering the American market, one of the highest overall [Vietnamnet 2025, 19 December]. If implemented, such a measure would have severely damaged the Vietnamese economy, whose performance is deeply intertwined with the exports to the United States, i.e. Hanoi's principal export market [Anh 2025, 17 February]. In order to try to remedy the situation, already on 4 April General Secretary Tô Lâm called President Donald Trump to signal Vietnam's resolution to come to an agreement correcting some of the perceived imbalances in the trade relations [Lewe 2025, 18 December]. After months of negotiations, in July the Vietnamese Government managed to strike a preliminary trade deal with its U.S. counterpart, who, for its part, agreed to lower the tariff rate to 20% [Hayton 2025, 14 August]. Finally, on 26 October, the White House announced that the United States and Vietnam had reached an understanding on a Framework for an Agreement on Reciprocal, Fair, and Balanced Trade. According to it, Washington would keep in place the 20% tariffs on Hanoi's exported goods, while at the same time being granted a preferential market access for its industrial and agricultural exports to Vietnam [The White House 2025, 26 October]. As hinted by a journalistic inquiry from the New York Times, it is not to be excluded that the striking of such deals has been facilitated by the concession on the part of the Vietnamese Government of a fast-track procedure to the Trump Organization's envisaged project to build a US\$1.5 billion golf venue in Hanoi's outskirts [Cave 2025, 25 May]. Also, a rumour circulated at the end of April 2025 that Vietnam had reached an agreement in principle to buy up to 24 U.S.-made F-16 fighter jets, which should probably also be interpreted as a tactic to soften Washington's hard-

line stance vis-à-vis the Southeast Asian country in the trade domain [Thai 2025, 27 May].

In spite of such trade turbulence, the Vietnamese commercial balance vis-à-vis the United States remained favourable. As reported by Reuters, in the first eleven months of 2025, Vietnam's trade surplus with its American counterpart accounted for US\$ 121.6 billion, with its exports registering a 22.5% increase from the previous year [Vu and Guarascio 2025, 6 December]. The performance is even more notable if one takes into account the U.S. Administration's increased scrutiny over the so-called «trans-shipment» of Chinese goods via Vietnam, i.e. the practice by some Chinese firms to re-route their «made in China» products through the Southeast Asian nation and relabel them «made in Vietnam» with little-to-no locally added value, with the aim to circumvent higher U.S tariffs imposed on Chinese manufacturing. Ultimately, given the opaqueness of the United States' definition of what exactly qualifies as trans-shipped goods, how the issue will play out in 2026 and what consequences it will have on Vietnam still remains to be seen [Lopez 2025, 5 September]. However, the fact remains that, so far, Vietnam has managed to keep a favourable commercial account with Washington amid severe trade tensions.

The issue of trans-shipment is also a good proxy to understand that, next to the United States, China kept playing a fundamental symbiotic role in relation to the Vietnamese economy in 2025. Data provided by the Vietnam Trade Promotion Agency illustrate how, in the first nine months of the year, bilateral trade registered a year-to-year increase of 23% [Vietnam News 2025, 28 October]. Importantly, Beijing remained the country's main supplier, with a provision of goods accounting for a value of more than US\$ 150 billion in the past year and providing key input for Vietnam's manufacturing industry [Nguyen Hanh 2025, 11 November]. In addition, Chinese companies have been making inroads into the Vietnamese market; for instance, tech firms such as Huawei and ZTE have recently been granted a number of contracts to provide telecommunication equipment [Guarascio 2025, 28 November]. As such, at present, Beijing's influence in the country is considerably on the rise [Guarascio et al. 2025, 14 April].

#### 4. *Security and foreign policy*

##### 4.1. *A «bamboo diplomacy» gone too far?*

When it comes to the conduct of its foreign policy and security relations, in the year 2025 Hanoi maintained its «bamboo diplomacy» doctrine. In practical terms, such a strategy entails that Vietnam «will promote diplomatic

ties that serve its varied interests, even when the key partners in question may be politically opposed to each other» [Quang-Anh Tran 2025, p. 230]. Ultimately, the aim of the «bamboo diplomacy» is to maintain the country's long-held non-aligned stance and flexibility of action in the international arena [Nguyen 2024, 12 July]. Here again, the key protagonist has been General Secretary Tô Lâm. Under his guidance, the CPV has attributed to the conduct of foreign affairs the status of a «core, frequent mission», instrumental to advance national interests [Vu 2025, 27 November]. In concrete terms, such an update entails that Vietnam is gearing up to double down on the use of diplomatic engagements to boost its international profile and to manoeuvre within a more complicated global landscape. In accord with this vision, as many analysts have noted, Tô Lâm's figure has been front and centre during this year, demonstrating a marked activism in foreign policy affairs [Hoang and Pham 2025, 30 October]. Importantly, such activism can especially be observed in the flurry of relationships that the Vietnamese leadership entertained with different important players at the same time.

At the foreign policy level, the most important event to record is the state visit to Vietnam by Chinese President Xi Jinping in April 2025, in the context of a tour he made in Southeast Asia. At an official level, Xi Jinping's passage served to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. The visit also had important practical outcomes, such as the signature of forty-five cooperation agreements in areas such as infrastructure development, science cooperation, and supply chain security [Li et al. 2025, 22 April]. Also, the two sides pledged to continue working together on the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative, i.e. China's flagship foreign policy frameworks to which Vietnam adhered back in 2023. Importantly, it must be noted that Hanoi was the first place where Xi Jinping stopped by during his Southeast Asia voyage; as scholars have highlighted, «Xi's decision to make Vietnam his first stop sends a clear message — as Washington threatens punitive measures, Beijing offers economic stability and partnership» [Ellis 2025, 6 June].

In parallel, Hanoi continued its engagement with the United States. At the margins of the APEC meeting in the Republic of Korea in October 2025, Vietnam's President Lương Cường met with U.S. President Donald Trump. Besides trade-related talks, during the encounter the Vietnamese statesman called for increasing cooperation in political-diplomatic affairs, inter alia [Vietnam News 2025, 29 October]. In the same month, Vietnamese Prime Minister Phạm Minh Chính also held a meeting with President Trump at the ASEAN-United States Summit in Malaysia, extending to him an invitation to visit Vietnam [Vietnam Plus 2025, 26 October]. Put into

perspective, such activities represent the concretization of the multi-vectorial foreign policy, which is the trademark of the «bamboo diplomacy».

The same approach can be observed in the conduct of Vietnam's security and defence relations with external partners. In this context, the most relevant news to report for 2025 is the revelation by the New York Times that Vietnam's military had been secretly looking to finalize deals to purchase arms systems from Russia, allegedly including 40 fighter jets, for a value of around US\$ 8 billion [Cave 2025, 27 October]. To be sure, Hanoi-Moscow military linkages are extensive and go back a long way, up to the Cold War period [Zaręba 2022]. Yet, at a time when the Russian defence-industrial complex has been subject to sanctions and export-control measures by the European Union as well as by Asian states such as Japan, the Republic of Korea, and Singapore, the report about such undisclosed arms acquisitions might risk putting the country under a negative light and possibly endanger the image of a non-aligned actor that it seeks to project internationally.

The year 2025 has also been characterized by a tightening of military relations with China. Despite their existing territorial disputes in the South China Sea, the two countries continued their routine joint naval patrols in the Gulf of Tonkin [Vietnam News 2025, 25 November]. In addition, in July, Vietnamese and Chinese soldiers conducted the «Hand-in-Hand 2025» exercise in China's Guangxi Zhuang region. This event represents a significant milestone in the defence relationship between the two neighbours, as it is their first ever joint training between their armies [Nguyen 2025, 27 November]. Finally, the intensification of security cooperation has been functional to maintain close links at the party-to-party level, which is essential to preserve Vietnam's regime security against any possible external interferences [Seow 2025, 6 August]. All things considered, in this case as well Hanoi proved to be pragmatic, deepening military cooperation with China as a way to hedge its bets against a complexifying international environment and to manage a powerful neighbour.

Finally, the last leg of «bamboo diplomacy» can be observed in the country's security relations with the United States. As observed above, the rumour that circulated in April 2025 about Vietnam's willingness to purchase American-made F-16 fighter jets can be interpreted as a way to signal closeness to Washington. Yet, to date, no confirmation about the deal's finalization has been announced. In any case, the U.S.-Vietnam defence engagement continued unabated, even in the face of frictions in the trade domain. On 2 November, U.S. Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth visited the country and met with CPV General Secretary Tô Lâm and Defense Minister Phan Văn Giang. During the meeting, Tô Lâm framed defence cooperation as «one of the most important pillars of bilateral relations» [DefenseNews 2025, 17 November]. The importance of bilateral defence ties was also

reiterated during the 14th iteration of the Vietnam-U.S. Political-Security-Defense Dialogue, held one month later in Washington DC [Vietnam Plus 2025, 20 December].

By connecting the dots, it appears evident that Vietnam's foreign policy and defence relations with these three great powers in the current year should be regarded through the lens of a hands-on, multi-engaged foreign policy, consistent with the aforementioned «bamboo diplomacy». However, the looming question is for how long such a diplomatic approach can continue to yield results amid rising regional and international tensions and growing great-power rivalries. For instance, would the United States eventually agree to greenlight the sale of sensitive U.S.-made military equipment, given Vietnam's potential parallel acquisition of arms from Russia? Also, would the U.S. military be willing to boost relations with the Southeast Asian country, considering its apparent growing embrace of China? Or, conversely, could the U.S. Administration threaten to walk back from the apparent trade truce reached with Vietnam as a leverage to force it to water down its security engagement with Beijing? And finally, is China prepared to accept a potential increase of Russia's strategic influence in a country in its close neighbourhood? Evidently, it appears very difficult that all these issues can be true at the same time, representing a sort of «impossible triangle» which, in the medium-long term, might present the leadership in Hanoi with difficult choices to make.

A similar reasoning applies to Vietnam's relations with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). In October 2025, a high-level delegation led by the CPV's head Tô Lâm visited the northeast Asian country for the first time in eighteen years. Among the different agreements signed on this occasion, it has been reported that there was one covering defence cooperation, even though the details of it remain secret [Kim 2025, 13 October]. To be sure, Vietnamese-DPRK relations are in a sense a natural occurrence, as both are one-party communist states. Yet, besides party-to-party ties, even if one looks at the visit through the lens of a multi-directional and actively neutral foreign policy, one may wonder what kind of concrete advantages might accrue to Vietnam from engaging a regional «pariah», and all the more in a sensitive sector as the DPRK's defence, which has been under United Nations sanctions since 2006 [Council on Foreign Relations 2022, 27 July]. As some scholars have commented, the visit should be read as a signalling exercise to different international actors that Hanoi is determined to be a friend with all parties and an enemy to none, being a sort of pragmatic diplomatic mediator and a «bridge» in a complex security environment [Pham 2025, 10 October; Yu 2025, 10 October]. On the other hand, however, it remains to be seen to what extremes such a position can be taken without giving to some partners the impression that, in reality, Vietnam

is playing at too many tables at the same time, and even with problematic actors that are not socialized into the region's established institutional frameworks.

In addition, Vietnam's fragmented military procurement is also an integral consequence of its «bamboo diplomacy». Above, it has been explained how the country's leadership in 2025 has shown interest in acquiring fighter jets from both Russia and the United States. In addition, in the past months, news has circulated that Hanoi is negotiating a deal to buy US\$ 300 million worth of K9 self-propelled howitzers from the Republic of Korea, and another deal worth US\$ 700 million to purchase BrahMos supersonic missile systems from India [Malyasov 2025, 24 January; Malyasov 2024, 31 December]. As is apparent in the case of other Southeast Asian nations, such as Indonesia [Harsono 2025, 29 September], the acquisition of arms systems from a range of diverse actors, at times even having diametrically opposed strategic *weltanschauungs*, risks creating serious operational problems for the Vietnamese armed forces and sacrificing long-term strategic planning on the altar of short-term politico-diplomatic posturing.

Next to its relationships with these great and regional powers, the year 2025 also witnessed Vietnam being active in its regional theatre of reference. In the South China Sea, Hanoi added artificial land to all 21 rocks and features it occupies in the strategically relevant Spratly Islands [Snell 2025, 17 December]. The area enlargement has been complemented by the construction of military structures such as munition deposits and a runway [Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative 2025, 22 August]. Unlike Chinese land reclamation and militarization activities in other areas of the South China Sea, analysts have highlighted how Vietnam's activities should be seen as having purely defensive purposes [Pham 2025, 30 October]. Interestingly, contrary to its assertive response to the Philippines' multifaceted moves in the South China Sea, in the case of Vietnam's actions, Beijing has maintained a low profile and not publicly opposed them, a fact that seems to suggest that, if discussions between the two are happening, they are taking place through informal channels, likely at a party-to-party level (Steinhauser et al. 2025, 2 November). Lastly, Vietnam quietly reinforced its role as the leading architect in the Mekong Region's diplomacy. In this regard, we might note the high-level meeting that took place in Ho Chi Minh City in February 2025 between CPV General Secretary Tô Lâm, Cambodian People's Party President and President of the Cambodian Senate Hun Sen, and General Secretary of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party and President of Laos Thongloun Sisoulith, as well as the three countries' Prime Ministers. Under Vietnam's auspices, the event served as an important occasion to take stock of the progress in trilateral cooperation, discuss the Mekong Region's current

challenges, and reflect on new future joint endeavours in areas such as defence and security, economic integration, and scientific-technical collaboration [People's Army Newspaper 2025, 22 February].

## 5. Conclusion

To sum up, in the year 2025 Vietnam has seen the power consolidation of CPV's General Secretary Tô Lâm, continued economic growth, and the prosecution of its longstanding «bamboo diplomacy». Internally, while it will take time to fully appreciate their effects, the extensive reforms have already redrawn the country's governmental and administrative structure. On trade, Vietnam has managed to control most of the damage originating from the Trump Administration's muscular trade policies and keep its close connection with China. In security and foreign affairs matters, Hanoi has continued to pursue a multi-directional strategy by engaging a number of great and regional powers concurrently, even though such an approach may soon become increasingly difficult to maintain as global and regional stability comes under growing strain. All things considered, it is possible to conclude that Vietnam's pragmatic policies have yielded results in 2025.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Agroberichten Buitenland*, 2025, 10 September, 'A new era for Vietnam: national and local restructure for efficiency'.
- Anh, Kim, 2025, 17 February, 'U.S. remains Viet Nam's largest export market in January', *Socialist Republic of Vietnam Government News*.
- Anh, Kim, 2025, 19 February, 'New organizational structure of Government', *Socialist Republic of Vietnam Government News*.
- Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, 2025, 22 August, 'No Islet Left Behind: Vietnam Reclaims Land at Every Remaining Spratly Outpost', Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).
- Asia News Network*, 2025, 3 September, 'Vietnam marks 80 years of independence with rousing ceremony, military parade'.
- Cave, Damien, 2025, 25 May, 'Why Vietnam Ignored Its Own Laws to Fast-Track a Trump Family Golf Complex', *The New York Times*.
- Cave, Damien, 2025, 27 October, '3 Takeaways From Vietnam's Drift Toward Russia and Away From America', *The New York Times*.
- Cave, Damien, and Tung Ngo, 2026, 10 February, 'Vietnam's Leader Has New Power, and He's in a Hurry', *The New York Times*.

- Council on Foreign Relations*, 2022, 27 July, ‘What to Know About Sanctions on North Korea’, Backgrounder.
- DefenseNews*, 2025, 17 November, ‘US arms deal still up in the air after Hegseth visit to Vietnam’.
- Deutsche Welle*, 2025, 30 April, ‘50 years after the end of the Vietnam War’.
- Ellis, Asher, 2025, 6 June, ‘Vietnam’s careful US–China balancing act’, *East Asia Forum*.
- Government of China, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025, 14 April, *Xi Jinping Meets with Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh*.
- Government of Vietnam, Ministry of Science and Technology, 2025, 21 November, *Viet Nam to allocate US\$3.6 bln for development of science, technology, innovation in 2026: Prime Minister*.
- Guarascio, Francesco, 2025, 28 November, ‘Exclusive: Huawei, ZTE seal 5G deals in Vietnam after US tariffs, as ties with China warm’, *Reuters*.
- Guarascio, Francesco, Khanh Vu, and Phuong Nguyen, 2025, 14 April, ‘China, Vietnam sign deals as Xi visits Hanoi amid US tariff tensions’, *Reuters*.
- Hayton, Bill, 2025, 14 August, ‘Vietnam’s tariff deal with Trump reflects balancing act between US and China’, *Expert Comment, Chatham House*.
- Harithas, Barath, Kyle Meng, Evan Brown, and Catharine Mouradian, 2025, ‘“Liberation Day” Tariffs Explained’, *Commentary, Center for Strategic and International Studies*.
- Harsono, Hugh, 2025, 29 September, ‘Indonesia’s haphazard military acquisitions risks its global ambitions’, *Small Wars Journal*.
- Hoang, Thi Ha, and Thi Phuong Thao Pham, 2025, 30 October, ‘To Lam’s foreign policy leadership in the “era of national rise”’, *Fulcrum: Analysis on Southeast Asia*.
- Hutt, David, 2024, 23 August, ‘The Eighteenth Brumaire of To Lam’, *The Diplomat*.
- Hutt, David, 2025, 5 March, ‘What is Vietnam’s administrative ‘revolution’?’, *Deutsche Welle*.
- Kim, Jooheon, 2025, 13 October, ‘North Korea, Vietnam sign deals on enhancing defense cooperation, other ties’, *North Korea News*.
- Le, Phan, and Hai Thanh Nguyen, 2025, 26 June, ‘Vietnam’s double-digit growth target is unrealistic yet useful’, *East Asia Forum*.
- Lewe, Paul, 2025, 18 December, ‘Vietnam’s relations with the United States under Trump 2.0’. *Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung International Reports*.
- Li Mingjiang, Le Hong Hiep, Ngeow Chow Bing, and Neak Chandarith, 2025, 22 April, ‘How Southeast Asia sees Xi Jinping’s regional push amid U.S.-China tensions’, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*.
- Lin, Jonathan, Oh Hsiu-Hau, Tran Ngoc Hoang Phuong, and Tran Thi Phuong Thao, 2025, 8 July, ‘Significant restructuring of Vietnam government underway’, *Allen & Gledhill Perspectives*.
- Lopez, Jackson, 2025, 5 September, ‘In Vietnam’s case, what, exactly, is the target of Trump’s “transshipment” tariffs?’, *The Interpreter*.
- Malyasov, Dylan, 2024, 31 December, ‘Vietnam set to buy BrahMos missiles’, *Defence Blog*.
- Malyasov, Dylan, 2025, 24 January, ‘South Korea nears historic howitzer deal with Vietnam’, *Defence Blog*.
- Marr, David G., 2013, *Vietnam: State, War, and Revolution (1945–1946)*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- National Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2026, 5 January, *Socio-Economic Situation in the Fourth Quarter and 2025*.

- Nguyen Hanh, Vu, 2025, 11 November, 'Vietnam Economic Performance in 2025: GDP, FDI, and Trade', *Vietnam Briefing from Dezan Shira and Associates*.
- Nguyen Hanh, Vu, 2026, 22 January, 'Vietnam Economic Performance in 2025: GDP, FDI, and Trade', *Vietnam Briefing from Dezan Shira and Associates*.
- Nguyen, Khac Giang, 2024, 12 July, 'Bamboo in the wind: Vietnam's quest for neutrality', *E-International Relations*.
- Nguyen, Khac Giang, 2025, 27 November, 'Neither comrade nor ally: Decoding Vietnam's first army drill with China', *Commentary, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*.
- Nguyen, Khac Giang, 2023, 'Vietnam's anti-corruption campaign: Economic and political impacts', *ISEAS Perspective*, no. 41.
- Nguyen, Khac Giang, 2025, 'Vietnam's bureaucratic reforms: opportunities and challenges in the era of national rise', *ISEAS Perspective*, no. 14.
- Nguyen, Lien-Hang, and Edward Miller (eds.), 2024, *The Cambridge History of the Vietnam War*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- People's Army Newspaper*, 2025, 22 February, 'Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia fortify ties in new development phase'.
- Pham, Nga, 2025, 30 October, 'Vietnam steps up reclamation work on strategic reef in S China Sea in island-building efforts', *The Straits Times*.
- Pham, Quang Hien, 2025, 10 October, 'The message of the visit to North Korea that Vietnam wants to send to major countries', *Modern Diplomacy*.
- Phan, Xuan Dung, 2025, 31 January, 'Vietnam's Era of 'National Rise': Great Expectations', *Fulcrum: Analysis on Southeast Asia*, no. 32.
- Phan, Xuan Dung, 2025, 23 April, 'Vietnam goes big in its sprint to 2030', *East Asia Forum*.
- Quang-Anh Tran, Richard, 2025, 'Vietnam 2024: Continued economic growth, change in leadership, and «Bamboo Diplomacy»', *Asia Maior*, XXXV/2024, pp. 223–33.
- Reuters*, 2024, 26 August, 'How has Communist-run Vietnam's graft campaign shaken up its politics?'.
- Seow, Ian Cheng Wei, 2025, 6 August, 'Keep your enemies close: Vietnam's security cooperation with China', *Commentary, RSIS (S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies)*.
- Snell, Govi, 2025, 17 December, 'Vietnam nears completion of militarized South China Sea outposts', *Defense News*.
- Steinhauser, Gabriele, Emma Brown, and Ming Li, 2025, 2 November, 'Vietnam Is Building Islands to Challenge China's Hold on a Vital Waterway', *The Wall Street Journal*.
- Thai, Johnny, 2025, 27 May, 'How to read Vietnam's F-16 purchase', *Asia Times*.
- The Economist*, 2025, 22 May, 'The man with a plan for Vietnam'.
- The Economist*, 2025, 12 November, 'Vietnam is rushing ahead with ambitious domestic reforms'.
- The White House. Briefing and Statements, 2025, 26 October, *Joint Statement on a United States-Viet Nam Framework for an Agreement on Reciprocal, Fair, and Balanced Trade*.
- Truong, Son, 2025, 9 July, 'Analysis: Why Vietnam's To Lam moved so quickly to restructure the government', *Radio Free Asia*.
- Vietnamnet*, 2025, 19 December, 'After tariff turbulence, Vietnam eyes fair trade deal with the US'.
- Vietnam News*, 2025, 20 February, 'State leader requests comprehensive restructuring of Defence Ministry'.

- Vietnam News*, 2025, 28 October, 'Việt Nam, China trade poised for new record in 2025'.
- Vietnam News*, 2025, 29 October, 'State President Lương Cường meets with US President Donald Trump in RoK, discussing trade agreement's progress'.
- Vietnam News*, 2025, 25 November, 'Vietnamese, Chinese navies hold joint patrol in Gulf of Tonkin'.
- Vietnam Plus*, 2025, 30 April, 'Party chief's address at national celebration of liberation of South and national reunification'.
- Vietnam Plus*, 2025, 26 October, 'Vietnamese PM meets US President on 13th ASEAN-US Summit sidelines'.
- Vietnam Plus*, 2025, 20 December, 'Vietnam, US vow to boost political, security, defence ties at 14th dialogue'.
- VnExpress International*, 2025, 11 June, 'Lawmakers approve mergers to reduce Vietnam's cities and provinces to 34'.
- Vu, Khang, 2025, 27 November, 'Why Vietnam Is Elevating Foreign Affairs to a 'Core, Frequent' Mission', *The Diplomat*.
- Vu, Khanh, and Francesco Guarascio, 2025, 6 December, 'Vietnam November exports down 7.1 % from October, overall trade surplus shrinks', *Reuters*.
- Vu, Yen, and Huy Nguyen, 2025, 1 July, 'Vietnam's Major Judicial Reforms Take Effect 1 July 2025', *Rouse Insights*.
- Yu, Zeyuan, 2025, 10 October, 'Vietnam's quiet rise: The new diplomatic bridge to North Korea', *ThinkChina*.
- Zaręba, Michał, 2022, 'Role of military cooperation in Vietnam-Russia relations', *Eastern Review*, 2(11), pp. 51–66.