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LUXEMBURG
STIFTUNG**
SOUTHEAST ASIA
HANOI OFFICE

SOUTHEASTERN PERSPECTIVES

Vol. 1 No. 04/2025

Nguyen Van Tung

Spurred towards a Shared Future

Chinese President Xi Jinping's State Visit to Vietnam

Amid global turbulence arising from the tariff war initiated in Washington, Chinese President Xi Jinping toured several Southeast Asian nations. His state visit to Vietnam exemplifies a shift in China's foreign policy, turning towards its neighbors and building a 'community with a shared future'. In Vietnam, China's diplomatic efforts were well received. Both sides signed 45 bilateral agreements, including an extensive railway project. Vietnam's willingness to deepen ties despite prevailing uncertainties highlights the nation's foreign policy aims of strategic autonomy and multilateralization.

Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Vietnam on 14 and 15 April 2025, just days after Donald Trump's 'Liberation Day' announcement of sweeping global tariffs. On his first international trip of the year, he toured the three ASEAN countries of Vietnam, Malaysia, and Cambodia. This is his second stint to Hanoi within just 16 months, underlining the strategic importance of China-Vietnam relations.

Currently, China is the most important trade partner of Vietnam, followed by the US and South Korea. The trade volume between the two nations now exceeds 200 billion USD, a 6,400 times increase since the normalization of relations in 1991. The agenda of the visit was to deepen the bilateral 'Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative

Partnership' and to discuss the international and regional issues at hand. Their relationship had just recently been upgraded to a so-called 'community of shared future that carries strategic significance'. This framework, agreed upon during President Xi's previous visit to Vietnam in December 2023, had already begun ushering in a new era in China-Vietnam relations.

Ahead of their meeting, Xi Jinping and his Vietnamese counterpart To Lam both highlighted mutual trust as a crucial prerequisite for strengthening the relationship between the two nations, which they characterized as "both brothers and comrades". Faced with the increasingly unstable and unpredictable global context, the two sides also expressed concerns regarding trade and

investment restrictions. Both reaffirmed their commitment to upholding a non-discriminatory multilateral trading system, an equal and orderly multipolar world, and the globalization of an inclusive economy.

Vietnam welcomed President Xi Jinping with an unprecedented diplomatic reception. Upon arrival, the Chinese leader was greeted by State President Luong Cuong personally at Hanoi's Noi Bai International Airport. The following day, Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh bid him farewell. During his 26-hour-long stay, President Xi also held talks with the remaining two members of Vietnam's "Four Pillars" political system, namely General Secretary To Lam and National Assembly Chairman Tran Thanh Man. In a statement, Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh reaffirmed the importance of the strategic relationship between Vietnam and China, asserting that "Vietnam consistently views strengthening relations with China as an objective necessity, a strategic choice, and a top priority".

During this visit, a record-breaking 45 cooperation agreements have been signed between ministries, agencies, and localities of both nations. These span critical areas such as infrastructure, science and technology, artificial intelligence, education, digital economy, renewable energy, national defense and cultural exchange. Vietnamese leaders highlighted the establishment of three new rail links (Lao Cai-Hanoi-Hai Phong, Lang Son-Hanoi, and Mong Cai-Hai Phong) as the nation's highest priority in strategic infrastructure cooperation with Beijing. The Lao Cai-Hai Phong railway project alone will cost over 8 billion USD. It is expected to be completed by 2030 and will connect Hai Phong (the biggest seaport in Northern Vietnam) with Hekou (located in China's southwestern Yunnan Province). In addition, China and Vietnam will set up an inter-government

railway cooperation committee to promote railway connectivity and future collaboration. Importantly, both parties agreed on mechanisms to appropriately manage and resolve differences, such as the tensions related to the South China Sea, called East Sea in Vietnam.

Xi Jinping's diplomatic efforts were a direct response to the US's unpredictable trade and foreign policies. At the time of his visit, US-imposed tariff rates for China, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Cambodia hit 145%, 46%, 24%, and 29% respectively. For now, the US is the largest market for Vietnamese exports, contributing to around 30% of the country's GDP. The threatened tariff of 46% poses a significant challenge to Vietnam's annual growth target of 8%. Consequently, Xi Jinping's efforts may be perceived as China's attempt to reposition itself strategically as a stable and reliable partner.

Ahead of his tour through Southeast Asia, he hosted a conference titled 'Central Conference on Work Relating to Neighboring Countries' in which he repeatedly emphasized the need to build a regional 'community with a shared future'. His second state visit to Vietnam within just 16 months demonstrates this regional commitment by taking tangible steps.

However, Vietnam's warm welcome does not imply that it has chosen a side in the escalating confrontation between the US and China. In fact, it exemplifies the country's enduring foreign policy of independence, multilateralism, and friendship with all countries, without sacrificing its sovereignty and avoiding over-dependence on any single major power.

Mr. Nguyen Van Tung is Project Manager at Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung's Southeast Asia Office in Hanoi.

Published on May 8, 2025, by the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung Hanoi Office

Imprint

South Eastern Perspectives

Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung Hanoi Office

Hanoi, Vietnam

E-Mail: hanoi@rosalux.org

Website: <http://www.rosaluxhanoi.org>