

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

According to R.P. Barston, the concept of a ‘summit’ in traditional diplomacy was once portrayed as a high occasional meeting attended by high-level executives or heads of states with special purposes because it is the arena where decisions of highly important agenda usually take place.¹ However, since the 1960s the term has lost its exclusive meaning, and now is understood as a regular head-of-state gathering, such as G20 Summit, ASEAN, APEC, and many more.²

Although there are many writings assessing the process or outcomes of summits, very few highlight the perspective from a host country, who agrees to arrange the summit and bear its costs. Also, not many writings explain how the host countries use the momentum to conduct active strategies in maintaining high-profile foreign policy in order to benefit its national interests.³

One of the most recent historical summits occurred in June 2018 and February 2019. The entire world was appalled when the executive leaders of the United States of America (USA) and Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) announced their willingness to meet and embrace each other in a face-to-face diplomatic meeting, that BBC pinned it as the “Summit of The Century”.⁴

¹ R. P. Barston, *Modern Diplomacy*. 4th ed. (London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2014).

² Barston, *Modern Diplomacy*.

³ Barston, *Modern Diplomacy*.

⁴ Vaswani, Karishma. “The Summit of the Century: How Much Will It All Cost?” BBC News. BBC, June 11, 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-44435098>.

Throughout history, both countries have never been in a decent diplomatic relationship as DPRK completely closed off their border from outside intervention and their possession of nuclear power is seen as a threat to global stability by the hegemon United States. Hence, the summit was a historic moment for the United States, since President Trump is the first U.S. president to ever hold a summit meeting with the Supreme Leader of North Korea.

The summit was conducted twice in a span of year, in which both Southeast Asian countries were chosen to be the hosts. Unsurprisingly, Singapore was requested to host the first summit in 2018 as Singapore is one of the handful countries that has decent diplomatic relations with both the US and DPRK.⁵ However, the decision of choosing Vietnam as the host of the second summit in February 2019 raised some questions over Vietnam's capability in hosting the summit and its bilateral relationships with its former adversary.

It seemed, the past did not define the future. Vietnam and the United States in particular shared a bloody history through half of the 20th century. What Vietnam saw as an effort of foreign intervention to divide the nation, was actually a continuation of the US' Cold War agenda in containing the spread of communist influence, an effort to counterbalance the influence of the U.S.S.R and China in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the North.⁶ However, the war sparked one of

⁵ Yen Nee Lee. "White House Explains Why It Chose Singapore to Host Summit with North Korea." CNBC. June 8, 2018. <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/06/08/why-trump-and-kim-picked-singapore-for-meeting.html>.

⁶ Lewis M. Stern, *Defense Relations between the United States and Vietnam the Process of Normalization, 1977-2003* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Co., 2005).

the biggest anti-war movements within American societies.⁷ It led to a resistance of US military conscription and eventually the withdrawal of American troops, which finally ended the United States operation in Vietnam by signing the 1973 Paris Peace Accords.⁸

Thirteen years later, in 1986, Vietnam decided to reform its economic model into a multisector market-based economy, famously known as *Doi Moi*, due to immense military expenses and shortcomings of its command economy.⁹ The new policy brought a new realization to Vietnam that economic development and international prestige should also be the focus of its foreign policy, instead solely focusing on defending national security.¹⁰ Also, the new economic reform led to a path that would result in the normalization of Vietnam-U.S. bilateral relationship in the next decade.¹¹ The reformation implied the willingness of Vietnam to mend good diplomatic relations with the international community and it was warmly welcomed especially by the United States, who lifted its travel restriction to Vietnam in 1991 and lifted trade embargo in 1994 and continuously strengthened its bilateral relations throughout the years.¹²

On the other hand, the relationship between Vietnam and DPRK is described as a ‘fraternal’ ties, highly built upon their ideological solidarity since the

⁷ Stephen Zunes, “The US Anti-Vietnam War Movement (1964-1973).” ICNC, January 2010. <https://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/us-anti-vietnam-war-movement-1964-1973/>.

⁸ Zunes, “Anti-Vietnam.”

⁹ Le Hong Hiep, “Vietnam’s Strategic Trajectory from Internal Development to External Engagement.” Australian Strategic Policy Institute, June 2012. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep04019>.

¹⁰ Hiep, “Vietnam’s Strategic.”

¹¹ Eleanor Albert, “The Evolution of U.S.–Vietnam Ties.” Council on Foreign Relations. Council on Foreign Relations, March 20, 2019. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/evolution-us-vietnam-ties>.

¹² Albert, “US - Vietnam.”

1950s.¹³ During the Vietnam Civil War, North Korea constantly sent economic and military assistance to North Vietnam and the favor was returned by sending supplies of rice and hard currency to North Korea throughout decades.¹⁴ Ho Chi Minh and Kim Il-Sung were often going on diplomatic visits to each other. Therefore, the summit also reignited this fraternal tie as Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un was the first North-Korean head of state to visit Vietnam again in 55 years and he also paid a late tribute to Ho Chi Minh.¹⁵

Vietnam showed tremendous economic growth when they opened their market while maintaining a strong grip of a government. Hence, not only did the United States and Vietnam become close trading partners but the both shared similar interests in containing China's growing power in the South China Sea brought the two closer than ever, which gave another motivation for Vietnam to use the momentum of the summit to get into the United States' good side. From the DPRK perspective, their fraternal ties are one factor to choose Vietnam as the host but most importantly the Southeast Asia country simply provides a geographical advantage that made Supreme Leader Kim Jong-Un able to have an easy and safe travel using his armed train until Vietnam-Chinese border before continuing with armed vehicles.¹⁶

¹³ Lye Liang Fook et al., "Vietnam-North Korea Relations: Still a Special Relationship?" *The Institute of Southeast Asian Studies*, March 26, 2019. https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/ISEAS_Perspective_2019_18.pdf.

¹⁴ Fook, "Vietnam-North Korea."

¹⁵ Fook, "Vietnam-North Korea."

¹⁶ Joyce Lee, "North Korea's Kim on His Way by Train to Summit with Trump in Vietnam." Reuters. Thomson Reuters, February 24, 2019. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-usa-summit/north-koreas-kim-on-his-way-by-train-to-summit-with-trump-in-vietnam-idUSKCN1QC0VH>.

Therefore, given the geographical advantage of Vietnam and its grudge-free bilateral ties with the United States, Vietnam was indeed a suitable option. Once known as one of the most underdeveloped countries in Southeast Asia, Vietnam gradually built its capabilities and now became an emerging middle-power country with rapid economic growth up to 6 - 7% rivaling that of China, ever since they reformed its economic system.¹⁷ In 2018 alone, Vietnam attracted an astonishing US\$19bn of Foreign Direct Investment.¹⁸

Furthermore, since the *Doi Moi* transformation, Vietnam had reformed its foreign policy approach. The country learned its lesson after being ‘abandoned’ by Soviet Union, whom they heavily relied upon. Ever since, Vietnam strives to have a “*multi-directional*” foreign policy that emphasizes on pursuing good relations with as many countries as possible - especially the neighboring ones - and proactively integrate with the international community to reap both political and economic benefits.¹⁹ Another major highlight of this foreign policy approach is Vietnam’s attempt to dispense the threats of uncertain dynamic in the international community, particularly the ever-changing behavior of great powers.²⁰ Hence, this foreign policy prevents the country to either balance or bandwagon to one particular

¹⁷ Peter Vanham, “The Story behind Viet Nam's Miracle Growth.” World Economic Forum, September 11, 2018. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/09/how-vietnam-became-an-economic-miracle/>.

¹⁸ John Reed, *Trump-Kim Summit Puts Spotlight on Vietnam*. Financial Times, 22 Feb. 2019, www.ft.com/content/b7b32f5e-365e-11e9-bd3a-8b2a211d90d5.

¹⁹ Nicholas Chapman, “Mechanisms of Vietnam's Multidirectional Foreign Policy,” *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 36, no. 2 (2017): pp. 31-69, <https://doi.org/10.1177/186810341703600202>, 32.

²⁰ Nicholas Chapman, “Mechanisms of Vietnam's Multidirectional Foreign Policy,” *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 36, no. 2 (2017): pp. 31-69, <https://doi.org/10.1177/186810341703600202>, 32.

great power, while at the same time hedging against future threats that might disrupt its national interests.²¹

Another priority in Vietnam's foreign policy is elevating Vietnam's reputation in the international arena and show the world that Vietnam is a partner they can rely upon as well as boosting its activeness as a responsible member of the global community.²² In doing so, efforts have been made to re-introduce Vietnam as a country that is ready to declare its commitment to 'openness' and constantly strive to build a stable domestic environment that is safe for foreign investors to invest in.²³

Also, for the past decades Vietnam took a more active role in its contribution to the international community including frequently hosting high-level meetings, namely the Asia-Europe Meeting in 2004, the 2010 East Asia Summit, Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation in 2017 and the 2018 World Economic Forum in 2018.²⁴ The nation also got its turn in becoming the Chairman of Association of Southeast Asia Nation in 2019, further implying the nation's desire to be known as one of the prestigious ASEAN regional leaders. So, it was not a surprise when Vietnam agreed to become the host of the Second US-DPRK Summit with only a

²¹ Nicholas Chapman, "Mechanisms of Vietnam's Multidirectional Foreign Policy," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 36, no. 2 (2017): pp. 31-69, <https://doi.org/10.1177/186810341703600202>, 45.

²² Chapman, "Mechanism," 49.

²³ David H.D. Truong et al., "Vietnam in ASEAN — Economic Reform, Openness and Transformation: An Overview." *ASEAN Economic Bulletin* 13, no. 2 (1996): 159-68. www.jstor.org/stable/25773424.

²⁴ John Reed, *Trump-Kim Summit Puts Spotlight on Vietnam*. Financial Times, 22 Feb. 2019, www.ft.com/content/b7b32f5e-365e-11e9-bd3a-8b2a211d90d5.

two-week notice. They would not miss an opportunity to be part of a historic meeting of rivals US and DPRK.

Yet, one must also wonder how a host country gathers its funding to pay the summit. According to a report directed to the Scottish Government that talked about the economic impact in hosting the 2005 G8 Summit in Scotland, revealed that Scotland spent €60,1 million of the total €90,9 million, meaning more than 50% summit expenses were endured by the host country.²⁵ In the case of the First US-DPRK Summit held in Singapore, the City of Lion must bear the cost of a whopping US\$15 millions, half of which used for security measures but Singapore also had to be ‘responsible’ for the expenses of North Korea delegations.²⁶ Although Vietnam did not publish the exact costs they bear in hosting the Second US - DPRK Summit, it is widely assumed that the amount was not so different from Singapore.

Therefore, from this background we have found out that historically Vietnam has had fine relationships with both the U.S and D.P.R.K and been trying to boost its reputation to the international community. Financially though, hosting high-level summits are very expensive, especially for a middle-income country such as Vietnam. But, having a direct encounter with the world’s big power and fellow communist country is an opportunity that the small country does not get every day. So many of Vietnam’s national interests could be catered through this summit, if it managed properly, they could use the rare momentum to conduct

²⁵ “ECONOMIC IMPACT OF HOSTING THE 2005 G8 SUMMIT AT GLENEAGLES,” December 2005. <http://www.g8.utoronto.ca/scholar/gleneagles-impact.pdf>.

²⁶ Karishma Vaswani, “The Summit of the Century: How Much Will It All Cost?” BBC News. BBC, June 11, 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-44435098>.

summit diplomacy and gain maximum benefit politically and economically. Thus, to further analyze this topic, I am going to delve deeper into the concepts of national interests, political legitimacy and Vietnam's own multi-directional foreign policy as well as using the theory of Neorealism as the theoretical basis of this thesis.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the background explained above, I suggest the following research question:

- What political and economic motives does Vietnam aim in becoming the host for the 2019 Hanoi Summit?

1.3 Research Objectives

The main purposes of this thesis are to identify the interests behind the decision of Vietnam in wanting to host the 2019 Hanoi Summit and how they planned to use the summit to carry on its national interests in fulfilling its desired political and economic objectives. Also, this research wanted to examine how Vietnam uses the momentum to promote its nation's image that contributes to regional peace-making and development.

This research would also analyze whether arranging high-level summits is effective in improving bilateral relations with a great power that could affect future geopolitical strategy of the host-nation in the region.

1.4 Significance Of Research

The result of this research will provide an insight in understanding how the emerging developing countries gradually paving their way to develop a reputable position in the international community while using a high-level summit meeting as one of the effective diplomatic tools to achieve its national interests through implementation of active strategies and the practice of side-diplomacy. The capabilities of developing countries in contributing to the making of global stability are higher than ever, thus they ought to be given more opportunity to be part of the history in mending disputes between conflicted countries.

Furthermore, I hope my writing could contribute to the study of International Relations by giving a new perspective on how to assess a summit from the point of view of host countries in order to calculate its aftermaths and how it could influence the political and economic development of the host countries.

Lastly, this research will hopefully be useful for International Relations scholars to put more attention in the ever-changing dynamic of international community and the nature of international relations, in which territorial disputes could lead to shifting alliances like a quiet fact of Vietnam ‘secretly’ relying support from the United States to cope with the aggressive claim of China on South China Sea.

1.5 Structure Of Writing

The first chapter is the introduction where I explain the general overview of this thesis topic which includes the background of the topic, the research question that this thesis would address, the objectives of this thesis, as well as the purpose and significance of this thesis.

The second chapter is the theoretical framework. It further explains the international relations theory and related concepts that will be used as the foundational framework to analyze Vietnam's motivations in becoming the host of 2019 Hanoi Summit. This chapter also gathers peer-reviewed literatures in relation to the topic of the research.

The third chapter is the methodology as it provides an explanation on which research approach, research method and means of data collection will be used in the writing this thesis. Also, this chapter explains which data analysis technique will be mainly used in analyzing the collected data and information in answering the research question.

The fourth chapter, which is the analysis, is the peak of the thesis and establishes an in-depth analysis of the topic which is the political and economic objectives of Vietnam based on the data and information that have been gathered as well as its correlations to the international relations theory and concept used. The outcomes of the analysis are used to provide an answer to the research question of this thesis.

The fifth chapter, which is the conclusion, provides the summary and conclusion of the analysis from previous chapters.