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## **Background Brief:**

### **Vice President Harris to Visit Vietnam Scene Setter 4**

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We are preparing a report on the forthcoming visit by U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris to Vietnam. We request your responses to the following three questions:

Q1. What do you expect from Vice President Kamala Harris's visit?

ANSWER: I expect four major outcomes from Vice President Harris' visit to Hanoi this week. First, Vice President Harris will restate the Biden Administration's engagement with Southeast Asia and support for ASEAN centrality, a rules-based regional order grounded in international law and freedom of the seas for commerce. Vietnam will welcome this as a constructive contribution to peace, stability and security.

Second, Vice President Harris and her hosts likely will announce a range of initiatives focusing on cooperation to strengthen their comprehensive partnership, foremost will be combatting and recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic. Other areas of cooperation likely will include climate change mitigation, cyber security, trade and investment (digital trade and supply chain security), education, and people-to-people exchanges.

Third, I expect Vice President Harris' to reject China's illegal claims in the South China Sea and to offer support to Vietnam to continue building up its maritime security capacity.

Fourth, I expect both sides to commit to strengthening their comprehensive partnership with a view to raising bilateral relations to a strategic partnership in the future.

Q2. What is the role of Vietnam in U.S. regional policy?

ANSWER: The Biden Administration identified Vietnam (and Singapore) as a potential partner in its *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance* issued in March. This is because both Vietnam and Singapore are constructive and positive contributors to regional security through their support and leadership in ASEAN and other ASEAN-related multilateral institutions such as the East Asia Summit, ADMM-Plus, ASEAN Regional Forum etc.

The United States will give priority to assist Vietnam in a number of areas to strengthen its human resource development and capacity building, especially in maritime law enforcement and security.

There is some speculation that Vice President Harris and Vietnam's leaders will explore opportunities in developing Vietnam's electronics industry to a higher standard with a view to establish a secure supply chain to the American market for Vietnamese manufacturers.

Q3. In Hanoi, Harris will open a new office of the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention in South East Asia. How important is it to the U.S. engagement with the region amid the COVID-19 pandemic?

ANSWER: This will be a milestone development because it represents a long-term commitment by the United States not only to Vietnam but the region as well to deal with COVID-19 and other infectious diseases. The CDC will enable regional collaboration among public health experts to gather data on vaccine usage and efficacy and to make policy recommendations to combat and recover from COVID-19.

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