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Background Brief:

Japan's Prime Minister Kishida Fumio to Visit Vietnam: Scene Setter April 30, 2022

We request your insights about the upcoming official visit of Japan's Prime Minister Kishida Fumio to Vietnam at the invitation of Prime Minister Phạm Minh Chính from 30th April to 1st May.

Below are our main concerns:

Q1. Which message will the visit of Japan's prime minister PM Fumio send? His visit takes place on Vietnam Reunification Day; is there any special meaning behind this?

ANSWER: Prime Minister Kishida Fumio's visit to Vietnam is in reciprocation for Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh's visit in November last year. Prime Minister Chinh was the first foreign leader to visit Tokyo after Kishida was elected. Both leaders have stated publicly that bilateral relations are at an all-time high. PM Kishida's visit to Hanoi demonstrates that the two leaders are committed to further developing their extensive strategic partnership.

30th April has special significance in Vietnam because it marks the 47th anniversary of the reunification of the country. This will provide Prime Minister Kishida an opportunity to reinforce Japan's long-standing commitment to assist Vietnam in its development. Next year, the two countries will celebrate the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations.

Q2. Before he took office as Japan's Prime Minister, Kishida had paid several visits to Vietnam in many different roles. Previously, he also stated that he appreciated the Vietnam-Japan relationship. What do you think about his relationship with Vietnam?

ANSWER: The relationship between Vietnam and Japan has benefitted because of the political stability in both countries. The longevity of Japan's Liberal Democratic Party in office has provided consistency in Tokyo's policy towards Hanoi. Prime Minister Kishida has served in the Diet for many years and as a member he was General Secretary of the Japan-Vietnam Friendship Parliamentary Alliance. His current visit marks the fourth time he has come to Vietnam.

Japan and Vietnam became strategic partners in 2009. Kishida played an important role in raising bilateral relations to an extensive strategic partnership in 2014. Kishida's background means that their bilateral relations will continue to develop because there is already a high level of trust among the top leaders.

Q3. Japan has become one of Viet Nam's top partners and the first G7 country to recognize Viet Nam's market economy status (in October 2011). The Northeast Asian country is also the biggest ODA provider, the third-largest investor, and the fourth trade partner of Viet Nam. What do you think about the Japan - Vietnam bilateral relationship during the past years?

ANSWER: Japan became Vietnam's fourth strategic partner after Russia, India and China in 2009. During this period, as your question indicates, Japan has become Vietnam largest provider of development assistance (US \$23.76 billion), the largest foreign investor (US \$63.85 billion), and fourth largest trade partner (US \$31 billion in two-way trade September 2021).

Economic relations and supply chains were disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Japan has stepped up and provided Vietnam with more than 5 million doses of vaccines. Also, when Japanese companies were offered subsidies by their government to relocate to Southeast Asia, the majority chose Vietnam. Japan was keen to see travel restored between the two countries and welcomes Vietnamese interns and trainee-workers. In sum, the bilateral relationship has grown from strength to strength.

Q4. What are the main factors, both objective and subjective, that promote the relationship between the two countries?

ANSWER: Vietnam and Japan have complimentary economies. Japanese development assistance and direct investment contributes to growing economic interdependence which benefits both parties. The economic dimension – development assistance, trade and investment – is the main foundation for bilateral relations.

Both countries share a convergence in strategic outlook as they both are affected by maritime disputes with China. Japan's economic and military strength, plus its alliance with the United States, assist Vietnam's goal of maintaining a multipolar balance in the region. Vietnam's independence, high international prestige and constructive role in ASEAN benefits Japan's foreign policy goals.

Q5. How do you assess the vision of the Japan - Vietnam bilateral relationship in the future?

ANSWER: The main contours of Japan-Vietnam bilateral relations were set out in the Joint Statement "Toward the Opening of a New Era in Japan-Viet Nam Extensive Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity in Asia" issued in November 2021 at the conclusion of Prime Minister Chinh's official visit to Japan.

The Joint Statement contained 29 points divided into seven areas of cooperation: bilateral, combating COVID-19, political-security, post-COVID economic recovery, human resource development, energy transition, and regional and international issues. In the future, Japan-Vietnam bilateral relations will heavily favour coordination to address regional and international issues (11 paragraphs or 38%) and post-COVID recovery/human resource development/energy transition (9 paragraphs or 31%). It is likely that Prime Minister Kishida's will re-endorse these priorities and identify specific actions to be undertaken in the near-term.

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