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Background Brief:

Vietnam to Name New State President

February 20, 2023

On 18 January, the National Assembly appointed Vice President Võ Thị Ánh Xuân Acting President following the resignation of Nguyễn Xuân Phúc until a successor is found. Unofficial sources in Hanoi reported today that the Vietnam Communist Party Politburo met six days ago and reached consensus on a candidate to become the next state president. The new president will serve until the present term in office expires in 2026.



Sources in Hanoi report that Tô Lâm declined to have his name put forward, preferring to remain as Minister of Public Security and complete his second term in office. Lâm was born in July 1957 and will be sixty-six in early 2026 when the VCP's 14th national congress is likely to be held. Under present rules, Lâm can serve only two terms in the same office and would be expected to retire after reaching 65 years of age unless an exemption for "exceptional service" was approved.

Tô Lâm's withdrawal puts paid to speculation by foreign Hanoi watchers that the public security apparatus is becoming all dominant in Vietnam.

In the aftermath of President Phúc's resignation, VCP General Secretary Nguyễn Phú Trọng reportedly received pushback from senior party members that he was going too hard and too fast in his anti-corruption campaign by proposing to take action against Prime Minister Phạm Minh Chính on allegations of corruption by his family members.

The VCP Central Committee will be called into executive session from 27-28 February to consider the Politburo's decision to recommend Võ Văn Thưởng as the next state president. Prime Minister Chính's political fate appears to have been put on hold.

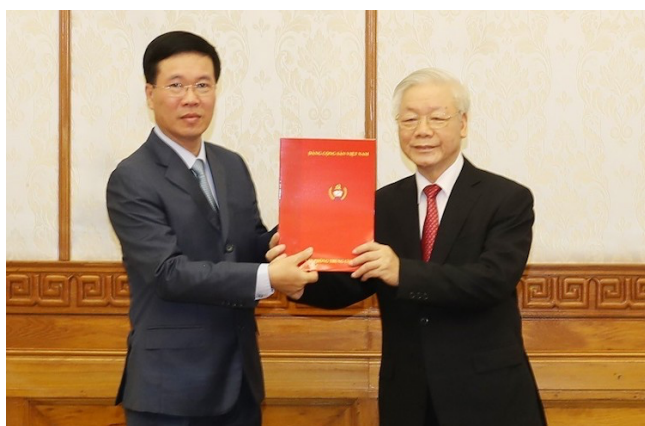
Thưởng, who was born in December 1970 in Hai Duong province, is the youngest member of the Politburo. His official biography lists Vinh Long as his home town (quê

quán). He majored in Marxist-Leninist ideology as an undergraduate. He received an M.A. in Philosophy, and later received an advanced degree in political theory from the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics.

Before attaining national stature, Thường spent two decades working in Ho Chi Minh City on student and youth affairs, including rising to the post of Secretary of the Ho Chi Minh City Communist Youth Union.

Thường was first elected to national office when he became an alternate member of the VCP Central Committee in April 2006 and was appointed First Secretary of the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union Central Committee. In 2011, Thường was elected a full member the Central Committee and appointed party secretary of Quang Ngai province from August 2011 to April 2014. The Politburo then appointed Thường Standing Deputy Secretary of the Ho Chi Minh City Party Committee (2015-2020).

Thường was re-elected to the Central Committee in 2016 and for the first time became a member of the Politburo. He served as Secretary of the VCP Central Committee and head of the Central Propaganda Department (Trưởng Ban Tuyên giáo Trung ương). In February 2021, he was re-elected to both positions and appointed Standing Secretary of the VCP Secretariat (Thường trực Ban Bí thư Ban Chấp Hành Trung, see photo below).



Thường is a ‘died in the wool’ party apparatchik and a trusted member of Secretary General Trọng’s inner circle. He serves concurrently as deputy head of the Central Steering Committee on Prevention and Control of Corruption and Negative Phenomena. If Thường’s nomination is approved by the Central Committee, his name will be formally presented to the

National Assembly for official ratification on or about 20 May.

When the fourteenth VCP national congress convenes in 2026, Thường will be approaching his 56th birthday at the end of the year and can look forward to another decade of service at the highest level in the party. If he excels in his presumptive new role as state president he would be an obvious candidate to replace Trọng as the next party leader.

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