

## **Roundtable: Vietnam's Domestic and International Challenges**

**Time:** 24 November, 2022, 14.00-16.30

**Venue:** Stockholm Center for Global Asia, Stockholm University (Street address: Frescativägen 26; Manne Siegbahn, Building C)

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The 13<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam early last year transpired without major new policy announcements. Focus was primarily on stability and regime security, evidenced for example by a largely untouched composition of the Central Committee, Politburo, and an extended mandate for the General Secretary to serve for a third term. Incumbents and new government leaders were selected and then affirmed after an election to the National Assembly in May. Following the logic of the precipitating congress, the number of independent non-party candidates who were permitted to stand for election were lower than in years. But despite tendencies of power centralization and apparent stability, challenges remain.

Meet three prominent Vietnam scholars for a discussion on important current challenges posed to Vietnam's international security, domestic development, and the Communist Party of Vietnam:

### **Vietnam facing China in the South China Sea**

#### *Stein Tønnesson*

Stein Tønnesson will discuss how China's growing naval power, and the Arbitral Tribunal's 2016 award in the Philippines v/China case, have affected Sino-Vietnamese relations and the prospects for conflict resolution in the South China Sea. After first summarizing what the conflicts in the South China Sea are about, he tries to establish what China has gained from constructing seven artificial islands in the Spratlys. Then he proceeds to arguing that the Arbitral Tribunal's award has undermined any chance for conflict resolution because it goes too radically against the interests of China. Finally, he briefly sketches what an equitable solution to the disputes over maritime boundaries might look like.

### **Vietnam's security paradoxes**

#### *Tran Bang*

Existing research discuss the objectives of Vietnam's security (security of the regime, sovereignty and peace), the strategic choice of Vietnam (neutrality in defense and hedging in international politics) and recently also the declaration of modernization of all defense systems of Vietnam after 2030 (from military thinking, organization to equipment) during the ruling party congress in 2021. But so far research has yet to address the challenges, or what Tran describes as the paradoxes, that Vietnam has to face when combining the abovementioned dimensions (objective, strategy and capacity realities) in the context of the current superpower conflict. Taking these dimensions into account, Bang identifies three main paradoxes in security. According to his analysis Vietnam will face serious problems such

as narrow margin of maneuver and less chance of development if the country continues the current strategy.

## **The Communist Party of Vietnam: total victory, then what?**

*Jonathan London*

Over the course of the last three decades, the Communist Party of Vietnam has reconstituted the basis of its rule by wedding market-based strategies of capital accumulation to Leninist modes of political organization and by promoting a sprawling market-oriented political settlement in which relations to the means of state administration shapes life chances. From the perspective of regime maintenance, the road Vietnam has traveled is more nuanced. Within the last 10 years, the Party's ruling "conservative" faction appears to have disciplined a presumptively dangerous breed of "corrupt reformers" while effectively silencing critics within and outside the party-state. As we approach the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the CPV's political unification of Vietnam, Jonathan London takes a look back at and a look forward to the principal challenges the party has and will face and distinguishing these from the challenges Vietnam faces as a country and as a people.

### **About the speakers**

**Jonathan London** is Associate Professor of political economy at Leiden University's Institute for Area Studies in The Netherlands. His recent publications include *The Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Vietnam* (Routledge 2023), *Welfare and Inequality in Marketizing East Asia* (2018), *Politics in Contemporary Vietnam* (Palgrave 2014), and *Education in Vietnam* (ISEAS 2011), as well as numerous scholarly articles and book chapters addressing Vietnam-focused and Asia-focused themes. London's current research includes a major study of Vietnam's education system. Beyond his scholarship, London has served as a consultant for such international organizations as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and Oxfam. He holds a PhD in sociology from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

**Tran Bang** is a PhD candidate in political science at University Paris 2 Panthéon - Assas, France. His dissertation focuses on the Vietnam's defense procurement decision making process. Before, he was aerospace engineer and consultant in market development. He graduated from Ecole Polytechnique and ISAE - Supaero (Institut Supérieur de l'Aéronautique et de l'Espace) in France.

**Stein Tønnesson** is Research Professor Emeritus at the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO). His publications on the South China Sea include:

2021: 'The South China Sea: Historical Developments,' in Zou Keyuan, ed. *The Routledge Handbook of the South China Sea*. London: Routledge: 31–45.

2020: 'Can China and Vietnam Use International Law to Resolve their Maritime Disputes?' in T. Engelbert, ed., *The South China Sea Conflict after the Arbitration of July 12, 2016*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.

2020: 'Four Aspects of the Crisis in the South China Sea' in L. Buszynski & Do Thanh Hai (eds), *The South China Sea: From a Regional Maritime Dispute to Geo-Strategic Competition*. London: Routledge, 9–23.

2016: 'The Tonkin Gulf Model of Conflict Resolution' in C.J. Jenner and Tran Trong Thuy, eds. *The South China Sea. Towards Sovereignty Based Conflict or Regional Cooperation?* Cambridge University Press: 151–170.

2015: 'The South China Sea: Law Trumps Power,' *Asian Survey* 55(3): 455–477.

2014: 'China's national interests and the law of the sea: Are they reconcilable?'" in Wu Shicun and Nong Hong, eds, *Recent Developments in the South China Sea*. London: Routledge, 199–227.

2013: (with Song Yann-huei), 'The Impact of the Law of the Sea Convention on Conflict and Conflict Management in the South China Sea', *Ocean Development and International Law* 44(3): 235–269.

2006: ['The South China Sea in the Age of European Decline.'](#) *Modern Asian Studies* 40, 11–57.

2003: ['Sino-Vietnamese Rapprochement and the South China Sea Irritant,'](#) *Security Dialogue* 34(1): 55–7

*This Roundtable is co-organized by the Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia Association (Föreningen Vietnam, Laos och Kambodja), and Stockholm Center for Global Asia, Stockholm University.*