My name is John Hamre and I want to welcome all of you. This is a largest group we’ve had at CSIS in two years. And it’s great to have you here. I want to say a special thank you to the Prime Minister. We are honored to have him here. We have been privileged to have hosted several very important previous leaders in Vietnam. Back in 2015, we had the secretary general of the Communist Party. That was Nguyen Phu Trong. That was in 2015. In 2013, we had President Truong who was here with us. And so today it’s a real privilege to have Prime Minister Pham.

You know, it was just very interesting because today I had a meeting with my Board of Trustees and we spent much of the morning talking about the remarkable changes that are going on in the world today, especially in Asia. You know, the aftershocks of COVID, the kind of difficulties with supply chains, companies wanting to see more reliability in supply chains, and almost every part of the conversation one country came up. And it was Vietnam. Everybody said, Vietnam is an important new partner here. But there was also an additional sentence, which is: Vietnam is being held back because it doesn’t have the infrastructure that it needs to become this leading partner in global supply chains. And so I think there’s an agenda that America and Vietnam could be working on.

You know, it’s an agenda that has to go beyond just building infrastructure. We have to deal with some of the legacies. I was talking with Ambassador Knapper about this. We’ve got legacies with each other we still have not worked through. And we should. Because our view is that we’ll be better off if Vietnam is more prosperous. That would be good for us. It would be good for Vietnam.

So we’re going to explore these issues today. And I’m very pleased to have all of you here. As I said, the biggest audience we’ve had in two years. And we’re delighted that you’re all here. I’m going to turn to my colleague, Greg Poling, who’s going to run this session for real. But I did want to come down and greet all of you and say thank you for coming. (Applause.)

I need to lower this. I’m not Dr. Hamre’s height. Well, Dr. Hamre, thank you so much. And I would like to echo Dr. Hamre’s thanks to all of you for coming here in person. This is not only a sign that Washington is reopening, but a sign that the strength of the U.S.-Vietnam partnership can really get people out. And this is by far the biggest event we’ve had since we started this phased reopening of our event space.

I’ll just say a few quick words, because I know nobody’s here to listen to me. But as Dr. Hamre said, my name is Greg Poling. And I run the Southeast Asia Program here, along with our Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, which focuses on maritime security. And I’ve been with CSIS for over 10 years now. Started in our Southeast Asia Program, originally as our Vietnam researcher.
In fact, the very first article that I never published with CSIS was a blog post in 2011 on the signing of the U.S.-Vietnam Military Medical Agreement, which was the first military agreement between our two countries ever.

And I just want to use that anecdote to reiterate how quickly we’ve really come. I think it’s difficult to remember that in the day-to-day, as we all focus on deliverables from every visit and comparing and contrasting. But the fact is that the U.S. and Vietnam did not normalize relations until 1995. Since that date we have seen one visit to Vietnam by every sitting U.S. president during their time in office. We forged a comprehensive partnership in 2013, the same year that, as Dr. Hamre said, we hosted President Sang for his first visit to Washington. We then hosted General Secretary of the Communist Party Nguyen Phu Trong for his first-ever visit – the first-ever visit of a general secretary to Washington, in 2015.

And just a year later, I think people forget only six years ago, we lifted the last block on the sale of military equipment between our two countries, fully normalizing the security relationship. That’s remarkable progress, from having had no relationship whatsoever when I was born, no relationship until 1995. And CSIS is, I think, particularly proud to continue to play a role in hosting the leadership of Vietnam as we continue that effort to normalize relations.

So with that, a big of housekeeping. As a reminder, this event is made possible by general support to CSIS. It’s being broadcast over our website, over YouTube for those at home. The video will be up and available. And everything you hear is going to be on the record.

Now, our guest of honor, Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh, is a politician, the current prime minister, and a member of the Politburo of the Communist Party of Vietnam. He’s a member of the National Assembly. He holds a doctorate in law and has been a member of the party since 1986. And, most importantly, this is, as far as I know, his first public event in the United States. And, as I said, he was kind enough to choose CSIS, keeping our streak going. So with that, please join me in welcoming Prime Minister Chinh. (Applause.)

(Note: Prime Minister Chinh’s remarks are made through an interpreter.)

Thank you. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for your very, very kind words for Vietnam. And thank you to CSIS as a whole for hosting the very meaningful meeting today to show that Washington is reopening, as you said.
Dear Dr. John Hamre, president and CEO of the Center for Strategic and International Studies – CSIS – ladies and gentlemen, today, I’m very, very happy to visit CSIS for the very first time, though this is far from the first time I have heard of the CSIS, a top U.S. think tank in the field of foreign strategies and policies and international issues.

Seventy-seven years ago, President Ho Chi Minh, the great national hero of Vietnam and great man of culture, prefaced the declaration of independence of Vietnam with this untarnishable fact – all men are created equal, that they are endowed by the Creator with certain unalienable rights. Among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That was in ’45 our president, Ho Chi Minh, said as much, quoted in the declaration of independence of Vietnam. This was also the spirit enshrined at the 1776 Declaration of Independence of the United States of America, demonstrating the common universal values shared by our two countries and also by mankind as a whole.

We are all elated to witness the extraordinary growth of the relationship between Vietnam and the U.S. in the three decades following normalization. That relationship has flourished and blossomed, so to speak, thanks to both sides’ efforts nurtured by sincerity, trust, and a sense of responsibility – sincerity, trust, and responsibility by sympathy, sharing, and mutual respect pursuant to the interest and desire of two countries, nations, and people.

Our two sides have overcome differences and reached common foundational principles for this relationship. This was established in the Vietnam-U.S. Joint Vision Statement back in 2015 during the official visit to the U.S. by General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong. The statement stressed, and I quote, “respect for each other’s political system, independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity.” That is in the Joint Vision Statement all the way back in 2015 – respect for each other’s political system, independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, a very special step indeed.

In the letter sent to General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong in 2021, President Biden stressed that the comprehensive partnership between the two sides have been very vibrant and we have been building its base on respect for the independent sovereignty and territorial integrity of each other. So President Joe Biden said as much in his letter to General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong.

Vietnam highly appreciates the constant support by the U.S. over the past years for a strong, independent, and prosperous Vietnam. Over the course of 27 years following normalization, four consecutive U.S. presidents have paid visits to Vietnam one after another, each leaving very good impressions in the hearts of the two peoples. Since the beginning of President Biden’s term, various high-level U.S. officials have visited Vietnam, even during the height of the pandemic back in 2021. Even during that difficult time, U.S. officials
still came to Vietnam, including VP Kamala Harris and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin.

In November last year when I attended COP26 in Glasgow, President Biden and I had a meeting. It was a very short meeting but very meaningful one at that. The foundations I have touched upon have given me faith and joy in my visit to the U.S., my first visit as a prime minister of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

I thank you, Dr. Hamre, president of CSIS, for inviting me to your discussion today taking place in an exceptionally special location and I thank you for your keen interest. Our discussion is all the more meaningful taking place as it does on the eve of the ASEAN-U.S. Special Summit. This is the first face-to-face meeting since 2016. It demonstrates the determination of ASEAN and U.S. leaders in promoting cooperation for peace, stability, and prosperity in the region and the world.

The international landscape is witnessing deep, rapid, and unpredictable changes. All of us – governments and scholars alike – are step up collaboration more than ever before to engage and share ideas to build a better world together.

In my remark today desiring to express the importance of sincerity, trust, and responsibility for a better world, I would like to share with you my thoughts on these things. First, how Vietnam sees the world today. Second, the role of sincerity, trust, responsibility in a turbulent world as we have today. I stress three things here: sincerity – that’s the most important; trust, trust in each other; and third, a sense of responsibility to one another. These are the three things I would like to stress during the discussion today.

The third topic is what we need to do in order to express sincerity, trust, responsibility for a better world. Ladies and gentlemen, into the third decade of the 21st century peace, cooperation, and development remained all the desires of the peoples of the world. Yet, these aspirations are facing the most trying time since the Cold War ended. Globalization, international economic integration, and the world economy itself stand before new opportunities for development, especially with the advancement of the Fourth Industrial Revolution brought to the table. Yet, the COVID-19 pandemic, along with geopolitical, geoeconomic, and strategic competition are creating breakthroughs in the state of the world with unpredictabilities and multidimensional impact on the security and development of environment of various countries, their interwoven activities, and shared interests.

A mere few years ago, few would have foreseen 6 million would perish due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Equally few could have predicted a conflict erupting in the middle of Europe. These events have caused immense
consequences on the security, political, economic, societal landscape of the whole world. One can say that while the world on the whole is at peace, there might be localized wars; while it is on the whole in détente, there might be localized tension; while it is on the whole stable, there might still be localized conflicts. We are all aware of this.

All of this is giving rise to the risk of war and instabilities confronting the world economy with many hazards. Meanwhile, competition and confrontation are giving rise to a decoupling in politics, security, and economy. On top of this, traditional and nontraditional security challenges such as climate change, natural disasters, resource depletion, energy, water, food, and human cybersecurity, and many others, are still developing in very complex ways. This state of affairs greatly affects various nations’ efforts to realize the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. We must, then, be fully aware of both opportunities and challenges facing peace, cooperation, and development in a rapidly-changing world.

Of these two aspects, the challenging side seems to be more prominent. Our efforts for cooperation, therefore, is required if we are to effectively tackle this state of affairs. From the global and regional landscape and the reality of Vietnam’s diplomatic undertakings thus far, most recently its ASEAN chairmanship in 2020 and nonpermanent membership of the UNSC for 2020/2021, I have the following key observations that I would like to share with you.

First, peace, security, and development are organically linked. Peace, security, and development of a country will affect its own neighbors, as well as the region and the world.

Second, the interest of each nation-state must respect the legitimate interests of other states grounded in international law and the U.N. Charter.

Third, international integration is an inevitable course if we are to preserve peace, promote growth, and advance friendship among nations. No country, no matter how rich or powerful, is able to address everything on their own, especially global issues. Instead, there must be cooperation with other countries, the international community, and its populace.

Global issues will require a global approach and international cooperation to settle, in which multilateralism is upheld. For instance, in the fight against COVID-19 we can see this. No country can be safe if they remain a country that still have to fight against the pandemic. No person can be safe if there are others infected with COVID-19. The same goes for climate change response, environmental pollution, and resource depletion.
Fourth, all states and nations desire a better world of peace and well-being for each and every of their people. Therefore, we must place special importance on the human factor, viewing human beings as the center, the subject, the purpose, and the engine for the development of all ties of collaboration and partnership in international integration.

While, global issues require a global approach, whole of people issue must be addressed with a whole of people approach, and all policies must aim towards the people – encourage their innovation and cooperation.

Fifth, international integration is, objectively speaking, a matter of course. But in this process, each country must rely on its internal strength as a fundamental strategic, long-term, and decisive factor. While external resources are an important necessary constant and game changing element – or, as we say it, we must know how to combine national power with the power of our time in a judicious and effective way.

Ladies and gentlemen, sincerity, trust, and a sense of responsibility play an essential role in addressing those issues facing the world today. It is a lack of sincerity, trust, and responsibility and one of the causes for tension and conflicts in many places.

And we can see this deficiency in sincerity and trust is a major hindrance to cooperation among countries – be it bilateral and also to collaboration in responding to regional and global challenges. Therefore, more than ever we need to promote the building and cementing of sincerity and trust among countries.

At the same time, each country need to conduct themselves in a responsible way. Most of all, each must respect their own commitments and observe international law and the U.N. Charter. They must respect independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of each other, and they must respect the chosen political system another country has chosen that is supported by that country’s people. They must contribute to the common work of the international community according to their own ability.

We must uphold dialogue to understand each other more in order to address the differences and disputes among states. Credible and mutually beneficial cooperation on the basis of mutual respect is one of the best ways to settle existing issues among countries and build a better world.

Faced with unpredictable and complex problems across the globe, we must think seriously and responsibly so that for no reasons shall this paramount avenue be disrupted. Only through sufficient sincerity, trust and responsibility may countries work together to address issues substantively and effectively. The ASEAN itself stands testimony to the value of sincerity,
trust, and responsibility – evident in its contribution to addressing regional and global issues.

Located in between the Pacific and Indian Oceans, ASEAN has been making every effort to play a central role in the regional architecture that is taking shape. Its members are joining hands to build an ASEAN community according to its 2025 vision.

Rooted in the common ground of sincerity, trust and responsibility, ASEAN is playing its role and making all efforts, alongside its partners, to build a world and regional landscape for peace, stability, cooperation, and development based on international law and U.N. Charter. The ASEAN outlook of the Indo-Pacific stresses openness, inclusivity, based on cooperation and dialogue with all parties concerned.

ASEAN has established and is bolstering its network of strategic partnerships with most of its key partners, including the United States. ASEAN hopes to join its partners to build sincerity, promote trust, take responsible actions, and advise cooperation on the basis of respecting the independent sovereignty, territorial integrity, and political systems of each other, respecting international law. It seeks also to bolster international cooperation and in this way address global challenges, including COVID-19 and climate change and the protection of the environment, to name a few. These are global issues.

Ladies and gentlemen, as an active and responsible member in ASEAN and the international community, Vietnam always make every effort to contribute to dialogue and cooperation, and stands ready to play an active and positive role as befit(s) its capacity and standing. Those of you who look to Vietnam may ask me: How, then, does Vietnam demonstrate this sense of responsibility in the wake of regional and international issues? You would be aware that from the yoke of colonialism Vietnam claimed independence. From a divided country, we stand united today after a heroic struggle. From a poor country, backward country, we have risen through our efforts to become a medium-income country and well on a path to realize a development goal of our aspiration. By 2025, Vietnam shall be a developing country with modern-oriented industry, having graduated from lower-middle income. By 2030, it shall be a developing country with modern industry and upper-middle income. By 2045, it shall be a developed, high-income country.

It is important to know that Vietnam’s aspiration for development is inseparable from the aspiration for peace, stability, cooperation, and development of the entire region and the world at large. I hope that the U.S. and other partners would be keen on cooperating with and assist Vietnam in realizing this strategic vision in a sincere and effective way. At the same time,
this would open up great opportunities for more comprehensive and deeper cooperation between Vietnam and the U.S. and other countries alike.

Let me now touch on and clarify Vietnam’s views on how it demonstrates sincerity, strengthens trust, and bolsters responsibility in its cooperation with other countries, the region, and the international community.

First, Vietnam perseveres with its foreign policy line of independence, peace, friendship, cooperation, and development. It seeks to diversify and multilateralize relations. It is a good friend, a responsible member of the international community. Vietnam has always been persistent and transparent in making and conducting this policy line in a sincere and trustful way.

Second, between independence and dependence, our choice is always independence in the spirit of nothing is more precious than independence and freedom, to quote the great President Ho Chi Minh. But between negotiation and confrontation, we choose negotiation. Between dialogue and conflict, we choose dialogue. And between peace and war, we choose peace. Between cooperation and competition, we choose cooperation. And competition, if it exists at all, must be healthy, respecting the legitimate and lawful interests of each other. In a world full of turbulence, strategic competition, and a great many choices, Vietnam picks no side. Instead, it chooses justice, fairness, and goodness, based on the principles of international law and the U.N. Charter. It chooses equality and shared benefits for all and triumph for all.

Third, Vietnam is ready to engage in dialogue and cooperation to address differences and disputes. So it’s contributing toward peace, stability, and development. At the same time, we seek to ensure a balance of interests and satisfactory handling of the concerns of different partners, countries, and the international community.

It is for this reason that in the settlement of disputes and conflicts in the region and the world, including the East Sea, the South China Sea – a critical sea the countries within and beyond the region – we always seek to maintain peace, stability, ensure security, safety, freedom of navigation and overflight, preserve the legitimate rights and interests of parties, address disputes through peaceful means via dialogue based on respect for international law, especially the UNCLLOS 1982. We stand for the effective and full observance of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea – DOC – and are working towards making the Code of Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea – COC – that is concrete, effectual, and in line with international law, including 1982 UNCLOS.
There are two main issues in the East Sea. The first is the opposing claims on territories over waters and islands. And the second is the freedom of movement, of navigation, and overflight.

The first being the dispute – territorial disputes. Vietnam preserves and resolves to use the peaceful means to address the matter – true peaceful means, through diplomatic negotiation. That is Vietnam’s clear position. And when it comes to the safety and security of navigation and overflight, we must remember that this is the jugular vein of maritime transport with 60 percent of global transportation. Therefore, protecting the safety of this vital maritime route is the responsibility of all countries in the world. And we call upon all countries to work together with Vietnam to do this.

And of course, we must implement well the DOC and work towards the building of an effective COC. This is something that all the countries in the region are working on. However, this has to be based on international law, including UNCLOS 1982. In order to contribute responsibly to common international and regional matters, Vietnam takes the initiative to join and plays a role in the international – in multilateral mechanisms, especially ASEAN, the United Nations, and other regional, inter-regional, and Mekong sub-regional mechanisms according to the requirements and our own capability and particularities.

Vietnam has been positive, proactive, and responsible in its role as a non-permanent member of the UNSC for the term of 2008-2009 and 2020-2021. We have been part of this council twice. Vietnam directly takes part in the U.N. Peacekeeping forces, having sent its servicemen to this mission since June 2014. Late April last year, Vietnam sent a combat engineer team of 184 officers to Abyei, Africa, and a second-level field hospital with 63 servicemen, 10 of whom are servicewomen, to the mission in South Sudan. These have been some very concrete contributions.

As a country having undergone much turbulence and understands the losses after many wars for national liberation and reunification, Vietnam stands ready to contribute to the reconciliation among countries and states. We are, perhaps, one of the countries having undergone too many wars, especially during the 20th century. War, followed by embargo, and we feel in our heart the value of peace. And we have to say, Vietnam is a peace-loving country. Vietnam is a destination for – was a venue for second U.S.-DPRK summit.

Regarding the Ukraine issue, Vietnam supports and stands ready to take part in the efforts and initiatives of the international community in facilitating dialogue among the parties concerning their search for a long-term enduring solution. Vietnam has provided $500,000 in humanitarian aid to the Ukraine, despite its own difficulties. On this matter, it is Vietnam’s consistent position to respect the U.N. Charter and the principles of international law, to respect
independent sovereignty and territorial integrity of states, as well as their legitimate interests. And to address all disputes through peaceful means without use or threat of force. This is Vietnam’s consistent position.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, while itself facing great hardships, Vietnam still donated facemasks and medical equipment to 51 countries, including the U.S., and helped to fund the COVAX facility with millions of dollars. Let me take this opportunity to express our gratitude and applause to the international community, including the U.S., for the donation of vaccines in large quantities to Vietnam in the effort to combat the pandemic, especially the U.S. establishment of a CDC regional office for Southeast Asia in Hanoi on the occasion of VP Kamala Harris’ visit. Let me also clarify that the U.S., through the COVAX facility and in its own right, have provided millions of doses of vaccine in donation to Vietnam during our hardest time, and we owe our control of the pandemic to the donation of vaccines.

Of course, there’s also the part of the effort of the entire Vietnamese people and political system. But the vaccines remain the most important weapon in the fight against COVID-19.

Though still facing a great deal of socioeconomic difficulties and as a developing country, Vietnam expressed its responsibility and very high resolve in climate change response and will fulfill its pledges under the Paris Agreement in order to – as well as under COP26 in order to achieve net-zero emission by 2050.

I’ve had a lot of discussion with the academicians. Vietnam is a developing country. Vietnam is still a country – still a poor country. But we are still determined to achieve net-zero emission by 2050 in order to do our part to protect our planet.

But this has to be undertaken in a fairer and just way, and we call upon developed countries to help the developing countries and help the countries that are lower stage of development. Help them build their institutions, help them in technology, help them in financing, help them in managerial capacity, and help them in human resource training. Only then would the poorer and less developed countries be able to fulfill the commitments in the same way as the richer countries have made to protect our planet. That is the spirit.

Vietnam has been advancing economic and trade relations with most countries in the world. Vietnam has negotiated 15 FTAs, opening up an open market with 60 partners in the world, including all major economies, including the United States. This is an expression of responsibility towards free and open trade.
I've been very active in concrete and effective international integration through this network of FTAs and, of course, through other mechanisms. But you can see that the network of free trade agreement is a very good indicator of Vietnam's active international integration.

Ladies and gentlemen, Vietnam always desires to strengthen its cooperation with the U.S. on the basis of bolstering trust and responsibility of both sides in this interest of the two peoples and of peace, cooperation, and development in the region and the world.

I've had a lot of – quite a few meetings since this morning and I've always repeated this, if I am to inform you, and I believe this is something that we see very much eye to eye: To fulfill its national development targets, Vietnam cannot go alone. To go far, we need friends. It is not only today that Vietnam expresses its desire to work with the U.S. President Ho Chi Minh, our hero of national liberation and great man of culture, from the very first days of the new democratic republic, expressed his desire for an equal and comprehensive partnership with the U.S. in his letters to the U.S. government in 1946. A letter of 16th of February, he wrote this: Our goal is independence – full independence – and comprehensive partnership with the U.S. That was all the way back in 1946. President Ho Chi Minh raised this matter to the U.S.

Vietnam and the U.S. have gone a long way in the process of expressing sincerity and building trust to each other. First of all, the two sides earnestly joined hands in a concerted and determined effort to address war legacy issues. Vietnam has been active and very effective in cooperation with the U.S. in the search for U.S. KIAs and MIAs. Vietnam welcomes the U.S. efforts to address war legacy issues alongside Vietnam through dioxin remediation, support for persons with disabilities and Agent Orange victims, removal of UXOs, and cooperation to search for the remains of Vietnamese war martyrs.

Moving forward, the two sides should advance cooperation in addressing war legacy issues so that our two peoples would have more empathy with each other and work together towards the future. Since normalization after 27 years, cooperation in war or legacy issues is a highlight in our bilateral relations. And from this, our two sides have been able to step up our expression of trust and sincerity. And I hope – I have just had a discussion, very heartfelt discussion, with the president pro tempore of the Senate – of the U.S. Senate, and he is in agreement with me on this matter.

Since the beginning of normalization in 1995, the relationship between the two countries has grown steadily across the board. Allow me to go over it.

Politically, the two sides have been each other’s comprehensive partners in 2013 and have reached an agreement on the matters of principle in this relationship, most importantly being the respect for each other’s political
system, independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, mutual beneficial cooperation, and respect for the U.N. Charter and international law. The U.S., most notably, always desire(s) a strong, independent, and prosperous Vietnam. So this is a very important foundation.

Economically, the U.S. is Vietnam’s second-largest market, while Vietnam is the U.S.’s largest market in ASEAN and ninth-largest in the world. The Vietnam-U.S. trade agreement in 2000 was a launchpad that helped take the relationship between the two countries above and beyond. Bilateral trade last year, against all odds due to the COVID-19 pandemic, still reached almost $112 billion. So that is – compared to 1995, that’s an increase of almost 280 times. And we – let me repeat that we are also the U.S.’s largest market in ASEAN.

In education and training, Vietnam has the largest number of visiting students in the U.S. among Southeast Asian countries, with some 24,000 Vietnamese visiting students during 2019/2020 contributing a billion dollars to the U.S. economy in this field alone. The Fulbright University Vietnam has provided high-quality human capital in a timely manner to meet developmental needs in many sectors and professions in Vietnam. People-to-people exchanges, most remarkably, are also steadily growing. So education and training, a very great highlight. This is – you can see that the benefit is beyond measure because of how many students in Vietnam are starting in the U.S., and this number is only increasing. Of course, there’s students who – and fellows who go to study through scholarships, but the majority are funding their education by their own families’ financing.

Defense and security cooperation continues to progress through concrete and meaningful results in the spirit of the Joint Declaration and Vision Statement on Defense Cooperation in 2015. The two countries are also working very well together on a wide range of international and regional issues, from nuclear weapon nonproliferation, counterterrorism, responding to climate change and sea-level rise, to safeguarding food and water security, safety and security of navigation, nuclear security, and the maintenance of peace and stability, and promotion of cooperation in the Asia-Pacific, among others.

Ladies and gentlemen, given the groundwork of the relationship over the past three decades, we need to maintain the sincerity, respect, and responsibility in addressing war legacy issues to heal the wounds to the two nation(s) and nurture the relationship between the two sides to greater heights for the future to befit the potential and the aspiration and the interests of the two nations and contribute to peace, cooperation, and development in the region and the world. As the two sides have reiterated during the visit by General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong in 2015. With the U.S. and many other countries looking towards the Indo-Pacific while
Vietnam is advancing its development goals, our two countries are standing at the threshold of new opportunities to raise this relationship to greater heights, especially in economic, trade, investment, science, technology, digital transformation, education and training, combating climate change, and epidemics, and people-to-people ties, and in addressing regional and international matters of concern. Together with traditional matters, we also need to look towards future areas.

I wish to stress three areas where there is a great deal of potential going forward – in green growth, digital transformation, and supply chain diversification. Vietnam views green growth as a key mission to build a sustainable development space for happiness for today and, more importantly, for generations to come. To achieve its pledge of net zero by 2050, we pay special attention to drawing on resources, science, technologies, and managerial expertise, and institution-building capacity to develop clean energy, modern infrastructure, and sustainable water management, among others. We also see digital transformation and innovation as a major driver of the global economy going forward. Vietnam therefore is making all efforts to ride this new wave of digital transformation, to forget ahead and narrow the developmental gap.

These involve advancing comprehensive digital transformation through three pillars – digital government, digital economy, and digital society. At the same time, Vietnam is making every effort to take part in the global value supply chain, especially through diversifying its supply chain to meet the essential need of the world today. Vietnam will continue to be a reliable destination for international businesses, including U.S. businesses, in the effort to diversify the supply chain in a turbulent world. Green growth and digital transformation are two areas in which the U.S. is among the top of the world.

The U.S. economy is also the largest in the world with an expansive and diverse market. This is a solid foundation for the diversification of supply chains across the globe. The combination between the U.S. world leadership in this matter and increasing vigor and deepening international integration of the Vietnamese economy will open up enormous opportunities for cooperation between the two countries and the two sides’ business communities going forward.

Ladies and gentlemen, sincerity, trust, and responsibility are the key for all countries to address outstanding differences and disputes in a turbulent world today. That sincerity, trust, and responsibility are also a major contribution to the strong growth of a relationship between Vietnam and the U.S. over the past nearly 30 years. I trust that these shall also be the through-line to guide, advance, and take the partnership between Vietnam and the U.S. to greater, more effective heights going forward.
General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong in his visit to CSIS in 2015 stressed that the two sides need to set aside the past, overcome differences, build on similarities, and look towards the future. At the White House, President Obama also said that a constructive relationship between the two countries on the basis of mutual respect is in the interests of the two people. It is my hope that all of you, and all of us, would stand together and contribute to the nurturing of trust, sincerity, responsibility between our two countries. Certainly, this would be a concrete part in the interest of our two peoples and for peace, stability, cooperation and development in the region and the world.

I wish you health, happiness, and many successes. And thank you for your kind attention. (Applause.)

Mr. Poling: Well, I’m sure I speak for everybody here, Mr. Prime Minister, when I thank you for your remarks. I know you have a very, very busy schedule. Obviously, as do all of what seems to be half the Cabinet. (Laughs.) I’m not sure who’s running things in Hanoi right now, but we’ll get you on your way soon. We have time for a few questions, which we’ve collected from the audience. But first, I’d like to abuse my privilege as moderator and ask one of my own, if you don’t mind.

The Biden administration has continued its predecessor’s verbiage of framing its vision for the region as a free and open Indo-Pacific. How much does that vision align with the way Vietnam views the Indo-Pacific? What does a free and open Indo-Pacific mean, from Hanoi’s perspective?

Prime Minister Chinh: You want to ask our perspective? So you want to ask about our perspective about the free and open Indo-Pacific? It’s a very interesting question. Of course, my presentation have reflected a very important part of this question. Since this morning, I have had a lot of discussion with our American friends. And during this discussion, the Indo-Pacific – the U.S. outlook on Indo-Pacific is something we have just encountered – we have just seen a few months ago.

And our view is this: We would like to work with the U.S. to realize the four pillar of that initiative. The first is to ensure the stability of the supply chain. The second is digital economy, digital transformation, digital commerce. The third pillar is the fight against climate change. And the fourth pillar are issues related to labor, tax, and combatting corruption. These are very important to both the U.S., to Vietnam, and to other countries alike. But the concrete elements of that initiative is not yet set in – is not yet clarified. And we are ready to work alongside the U.S. to discuss, to further clarify what these pillars entail, and what we need to do, and what would be in the
interest of peace, cooperation and development, and prosperity, of the countries in the region and the world.

And of course, what is in the interest and what would meet – fulfill the aspiration of our two nations, we will do that. In short, we are ready to engage in discussion with the U.S. to clarify what these four pillars would entail. And when that is clarified, we will have something to discuss. That will be in line with the situation. That would be in line with what’s going on in the ground. We need time to have – we need more time to study this initiative, see what it entails. That is our perspective.

Mr. Poling:

Thank you very much. Let’s go to a couple of questions from the audience. The first I would like to ask comes from Andrew Wells-Dang, who’s with the U.S. Institute for Peace here in Washington, D.C.

Andrew says: How does U.S.-Vietnam cooperation on addressing war legacies contribute to building a stronger bilateral relationship in other areas? What steps can both governments to maintain and increase this cooperation?

Prime Minister Chinh:

I mentioned after 27 years of normalization the largest thing that we can see is the high-level exchange of delegations between the two sides. As I have said, nearly every U.S. administration, almost every president have set aside the time to visit Vietnam. And during a very short time in Glasgow, I have had a meeting with President Biden. And in that process, there are also other exchanges of delegations as well. And the exchange of delegations, what does it show? It shows what I stress. And that is sincerity, trust, and responsibility.

And that would add to the relationship between the two sides and give it strength to achieve what it has achieved – especially in trade, investment, economic cooperation, and people-to-people engagement. These are the clearest demonstration of the relationship between the two sides. And you can see this in trade exchanges. From 400 million to 112 billion. And that is during COVID-19 – during the complexities of COVID-19.

And there is also cooperation in other international forums as well. And Vietnam’s initiatives have been supported by the U.S. in the interests of the two countries, in the interests of the region of the world, for peace, cooperation and development in the world. These are the results that we can see. And from that foundation, we have come to a vision and a foundation. And that is the respect for each other’s independence, sovereignty, political system. And the U.S. always wants a strong, independent, and prosperous Vietnam. These are the foundation. These are the foundation.
And there are other things, of course, that we need to do, as I said. One of the things we need to do is to continue to address the war legacy issue. And in addressing war legacy issues, that would add to relationships between the two sides in all aspects, including the economic dimension. So we have to strengthen what we have already had. We must look for more opportunities to advance cooperation. And in areas where Vietnam has a potential and the U.S. has an edge, we can work together.

For example, digital transformation. For example, responding to climate change. For example, energy transformation. For example, other areas of cooperation such as, let's go into more concrete terms, combatting the rising sea level in the Mekong Delta or bank erosion – the riverbank erosion, poverty alleviation in the remote areas, in border areas, and in Vietnam's islands. We are very well set to do this.

And second, so ambassador had an opportunity to attend a conference on UXO removal. There is almost no place in Vietnam without UXO. And why is it so? Because there were too many wars in Vietnam, and after every war – after the war, after what you call the Vietnam War, we had the border war, and then there were the years of embargo. So all of these are things that we can work together on – UXO removal, bringing about true security for the people. These are things that we can always work together. There are a lot of space for us to work on.

And of course, in recent years in addition to trade you can see that – you can see that trade actually grow by two digits, more than 10 percent, 13 percent in some years. So there are a lot of space for us to grow into and there are a lot of mechanisms for us to build on, so we need to continue to do so. And based on that ground, we will move towards the future. We'll forge ahead towards the future. We will find new mechanisms, new channels, new venues for cooperation.

I'm not sure if that answers your question. If that's not clear yet, I can clarify it some more.

Mr. Poling: Thank you. That answered several of my questions.

I think we have time for just one more, so I'm going to give this one to Dong Phun Tran (ph), who's with the University of California in Berkeley. He says: Mr. Prime Minister, you said at the 26th U.N. climate change summit in Glasgow that Vietnam will achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. What is your roadmap and key policies to reach that target?

Prime Min. Chinh: Our roadmap. As I mentioned, we are a developing country and we are a country in a lot of difficulties, but we are still demonstrating our responsibility towards the international community. As I said in my speech,
Vietnam perseveres with the foreign policy line of independence, of reliance for cooperation and development in the world. We seek to diversify and multilateralize international relations, and be a good friend and partner, and a responsible member of the international community. A responsible member of the international community means whatever the megatrend in the world is, Vietnam would be committed to it in spite of our difficulties. So this is our roadmap.

First, we call – the first thing we do – the first thing we call for is fairness and justice. What this means is the richer countries should join hands with the poorer, developing countries, work together to this end. And why? It’s because, first, this is a global issue and requires a global approach. And a global approach here means to express the spirit of international cooperation and uphold multilateralism, because there is no way a single country can address this. The same for the pandemic; there is no way a single country can be safe if there are still countries afflicted with the pandemic. That is the first part of the roadmap. We would call on global solidarity.

The second part we need to review, and that is something we are doing indeed. We are reviewing Vietnam’s capability in the fulfillment of COP-26 – what we already have, what we are already doing. For example, we would have already announced the PDP8 in 2018, but we put a stop to all of that because we needed to adjust this PDP8 to ensure that it would work towards net-zero emission by 2050. We had to make a full adjustment of that development plan towards the reduction of carbon-emitting power plants with a roadmap until 2050 to ensure that, you know, we are – we are on the way to meet that commitment. These are the things that we need a roadmap.

Second, we call upon justice and fairness. We can’t do this alone. Therefore, we need to call upon a sense of justice, a sense of international cooperation and solidarity if we want to address this – first being institutional issues, second being technological issues, third being financing issues, fourth being the stabilization of the people’s livelihood during this transitionary period. That is what Vietnam would have to do. That is what we need a roadmap for. But international cooperation is indispensable, international help, assistance from wealthier country to developing countries like Vietnam, especially in technologies, in financing, and in reskilling. All of these are very much necessary, very important.

And the reason why we have to make a commitment is because we trust that we can do this if we join hands. If there is assistance from the wealthier countries towards the developing/less developed countries, we would be able to do it.
I hope that my question have been satisfactory. If not, I can clarify it a little bit more.

Mr. Poling: You've been excellent, and you have more meetings to get to over a week now. So I just want to thank you once again on behalf of CSIS and our guests here for taking time out to address us today. I think we all wish you the best with the rest of the U.S.-ASEAN summit and your other engagements in the U.S. over the next week. Please join me in thanking our guest of honor. (Applause.)

Prime Min. Chinh: I am also – I also thank you. I would like to thank all of you for having given me the opportunity to speak of the challenges facing the world and Vietnam. But no matter how much – how great a difficulty is, if we stand together in solidarity, if there is a joint effort of everyone, we can surely triumph over them. Thank you for your kind attention. (Applause.)