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Background Brief:

Vietnam's New Leadership: Two Scenarios

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There is not much public information about the selection process of candidates for Vietnam's key leadership positions – 1) General Secretary, 2) President, 3) Prime Minister and 4) National Assembly Chair – at its 13th National Party Congress to be held later this month. The current speculation is:

Scenario 1

General Secretary: Nguyễn Phú Trọng

President: Nguyễn Xuân Phúc

Prime Minister: Vương Đình Huệ

National Assembly chair: Phạm Minh Chính

or

Scenario 2

General Secretary: Nguyễn Phú Trọng

President: Nguyễn Xuân Phúc

Prime Minister: Phạm Minh Chính

National Assembly chair: Vương Đình Huệ

Basically the two configurations are the same, except Phạm Minh Chính and Vương Đình Huệ switch places.

Q1. We would like to ask what is your take on each of these positions? Who will hold which position, and why?

ANSWER: If Nguyễn Phú Trọng is re-elected Secretary General under either scenario, it means one of two things. Either Trọng is re-elected for a third full five-year term or he is re-elected on the understanding he will step down before his term expires (the precedent set by **Đỗ Mười**). Trọng's re-election under either scenario would be an indication that he was unsuccessful in grooming **Trần Quốc Vương** as his successor due to opposition by members of the Central Committee.

If Nguyễn Xuân Phúc is elected state president this could only be done by an exemption for exceptional service. Throughout the past year there have been persistent rumours that Phúc set his sights on becoming party leader. Since he has

only served one full term as prime minister, and has achieved a very high vote of confidence from his colleagues for his handling of this post, this too would smack of a compromise. In other words, Phúc is nominated as president and withdraws from contention for the party leadership.

It is rumoured that the Central Committee approved two exemptions for Politburo members over the age of 65. This would support the above two scenarios. My preferred scenario is Phúc's re-appointment as prime minister for a second full-term.

Q2. What insights can you offer on Phạm Minh Chính and Vương Đình Huệ, and what leadership positions they are likely to occupy?

ANSWER: Vương Đình Huệ, aged 63, is obviously the most qualified of the incumbent members of the Politburo who are under 65 for election as Prime Minister. He served as Deputy Prime Minister for the last five years. He has training in economics and he has served as Minister of Finance, Chief Auditor, and Head of the Central Economic Commission. Currently he is Secretary of the Hanoi Party Committee which some analysts see as an avenue to broaden his experience.

If Phúc is given a second term as prime minister, under scenario two Huệ would assume the post of Chair of the National Assembly. Alternately, other analysts speculate that if Phúc were re-elected prime minister, Huệ could be appointed Standing Member of the Secretariat.

Phạm Minh Chính ranks ninth on the Politburo, two positions above Huệ who ranks eleventh. Chính has a mixed career background in the party apparatus and in the security sector. He is head of the Secretariat, head of the Central Commission for Organisation and a former party secretary of Quang Ninh province. He has held various posts in the Ministry of Public Security covering logistics, technology and intelligence and he headed the Central Committee for Political Protection. This background would serve him well as state president but not particularly as prime minister.

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