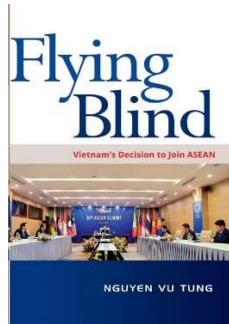


FOREIGN AFFAIRS

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Flying Blind: Vietnam's Decision to Join ASEAN

By Nguyen Vu Tung



ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, 2021, 236 pp

Reviewed By Lien-Hang T. Nguyen

Nguyen provides a peek into communist Vietnam's strategic deliberations regarding the Association of Southeast Asian Nations at the tail end of the Cold War. Using internal party documents and high-level interviews, Nguyen, a scholar and a diplomat, reveals the twists and turns leading to Hanoi's decision to join ASEAN in 1995. Initially, Vietnamese leaders maintained a hostile policy toward the regional association, viewing it first as an organization that would advance U.S.-style anticommunism in the waning years of the United States' war in Vietnam and later as a vehicle for China's anti-Vietnam campaign following Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia at the end of 1978 and the outbreak of the Sino-Vietnamese War in 1979. The ideological underpinnings of Vietnam's foreign policy during these conflict-ridden times prevented policymakers from seeing ASEAN on its own terms. Peacetime changed Hanoi's calculus. Vietnamese leaders began to understand ASEAN as a regional community that could support Hanoi's bid for rapid economic development. Nguyen deftly guides his readers through Hanoi's decision-making, turning once opaque dealings transparent