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## **Background Brief:**

# **What Will Be the Priorities of the Next U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam?**

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QUESTION-How do you think Ambassador Marc Knapper will chose to make his mark during his tenure as the U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam? In other words, which do you think are the areas that Ambassador will focus on, and what can the Vietnamese government as well as the people of Vietnam expect from this appointment?

ANSWER: Marc Knapper's priorities as the presumptive next U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam will be largely determined by the legacy of the 2013 comprehensive partnership during the Obama Administration and also the policies set by President Joe Biden and Secretary of State Anthony Blinken. The *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance* issued by President Biden in March calls on the U.S. to work alongside Vietnam and other ASEAN member states "to advance shared objectives" of which a Free and Open Indo-Pacific is paramount.

Knapper will be tasked with advancing the bilateral comprehensive partnership with Vietnam including political and diplomatic co-ordination regionally and internationally to strengthen ASEAN and other multilateral institutions; enhancing security and defence relations to build Vietnam's maritime security capacity to resist Chinese intimidation and bullying; ironing out irritants in bilateral economic and trade relations; and stepping up cooperation to combat the coronavirus including provision of vaccines.

Knapper's most difficult task will be to draw Vietnam into a U.S. "network of interoperable allies and partners willing and able to protect their sovereignty from coercion." It is clear from remarks by former U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam Daniel Kritenbrink and separate remarks by Vietnam's former Ambassador to the United States Pham Quang Vinh that practical cooperation of a strategic nature is more important than just raising bilateral relations to a strategic partnership for form's sake.

The Vietnamese government will want Knapper to provide reassurance that the U.S. will continue to respect Vietnam's political system, national sovereignty and territorial integrity. Both the Vietnamese government and people will expect Knapper to provide additional reassurance that the United States will continue to counter-balance Chinese influence and military power in the South China Sea.

Vietnam will also expect Knapper to continue to support U.S. funding to address war legacy issues, and U.S. assistance in education, science and technology, defence industry and environment including climate action.

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