

# Vietnam's new age of national rising

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**Abstract:** *The “era of national rise” as a new developmental strategy, mentioned and strongly advocated in the spiritual life of Vietnamese society today, is a period of breakthrough development, bold institutional reform of the country, towards the goal of becoming a developed and high-income country “on par with the great powers”. The strategy is determined to start from the 14th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam in 2026, an ideology that is inseparable from the role of General Secretary To Lam. The article reviews the impressive milestones that the General Secretary has presented at domestic and international forums, the core contents, important goals, “foundations for positioning”, policies and strategic solutions to realize it. Scientific issues which require further studies are also mentioned, to clarify the implications of the strategic ideology of “the era of rising” so as to actively contribute to the cause of national construction, development and defense in the coming period.*

**Keywords:** Vietnam, New Development Era, Era of National Rise, New Development Strategy, Breakthrough Development Strategy

## 1. Introduction

The term “era of national rise” is commonly used in scholarly literature. However, the concept “a new era of development - the era of the Vietnamese nation’s rise”, as currently articulated in Vietnam, is inseparable from the role of General Secretary To Lam in the final months of 2024. While seemingly familiar, this thought is genuinely new: Pragmatic and challenging yet optimistic, reflecting profound aspirations, innovative thinking, and a strategic outlook on the country’s resurgence on the eve of the Party’s 14th National Congress. It embodies a determination to realize President Ho Chi Minh’s aspiration expressed 80

years ago: “*Whether Vietnam can become beautiful and prosperous, and whether the Vietnamese nation can attain the heights of glory and stand on an equal footing with great powers of the five continents*” (Ho Chi Minh, *Collected works*, Vol. 4, 2011, p. 35). This vision exerts a profound influence on the nation’s spiritual life, shaping people’s perceptions, attitudes, and sentiments, while motivating society-wide action to implement the country’s breakthrough development strategy.

## 2. Remarkable milestones

On September 23, 2024, at the prestigious Columbia University in the United States, General Secretary To Lam, in his capacity as Head of State, delivered a speech: “After

nearly 80 years since national independence and almost 40 years of Doi Moi (reform), under the comprehensive leadership of the Communist Party, Vietnam now stands at a new historical threshold, a new era - the era of the Vietnamese nation's rise" (*The Era of Nation's Rise*, The World & Viet Nam, 2024). This was the first time that both international and domestic public opinion became aware of this concept, articulated as a political will for a new stage in Vietnam's development.

At the "Summit of the Future" of the 79th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, held on September 22-23, 2024, General Secretary and State President of Vietnam To Lam delivered a candid address before the international community, articulating "Vietnam's aspirations in the grand orchestration of our era" (*The Grand Orchestration of Our Era*, VNS, 2024).

Immediately afterward, a series of high-level visits to Cuba, Mongolia, Ireland, France, and Malaysia further underscored the spirit of the Vietnamese nation's rising era.

On October 21, 2024, at the opening of the 8th Session of the 15th National Assembly, General Secretary and State President To Lam delivered an address on legislative reform, the institutionalization of the 10th Central Committee's Resolution on organizational streamlining, and the improvement of working methods, thereby laying the groundwork for the nation's entry into a new era of development. He affirmed that among the three major bottlenecks hindering development, "institutions are the bottleneck of bottlenecks", which "waste resources and cause the country to miss opportunities for progress". With evident concern, he cautioned that without

genuine wisdom and courage for the common cause, inappropriate institutions could result in critical setbacks in the nation's development (To Lam, 2024a).

On October 31, 2024, at the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics, General Secretary To Lam, speaking in his capacity as a scholar, discussed key aspects of the new era - the era of national rise - with participants in the reserve training program for prospective 14th Central Committee members, who were assuming or would assume major responsibilities for the nation. On this occasion, he elaborated on the substance of the concept of "the era of national rise", the foundations for positioning to realize this era, and the seven strategic orientations to guide the nation into the new era (To Lam, 2024b).

On November 25, 2024, also at the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics, General Secretary To Lam provided a more detailed exposition of the theoretical foundations of "the new era of development" in a session attended by Politburo members, Central Committee members, leaders of ministries, agencies, and provinces, cities as well as many other key officials of the country. He clarified the significance, key elements, starting point, foundations for positioning, strategic solutions, and major policies, such as streamlining the state apparatus, promoting a digital society, and fighting corruption and waste, regarded as both fundamental and initial steps toward realizing the era of national rise (To Lam, 2024c).

On December 30, 2024, at the National Gathering of distinguished intellectuals and scientists, General Secretary To Lam delivered a particularly remarkable address. The Head of the Party candidly acknowledged that "the fulfillment of

the responsibilities and mission of the nation's intellectuals and scientists remains limited compared with the expectations and investments of the Party, the State, and the people". In the era of national rise, "intellectuals and scientists must serve as the core force, those endowed with transformative power to place Vietnam among the top three countries in Southeast Asia in artificial intelligence (AI) research and development; to advance the country into the world's top fifty in digital competitiveness and the e-government development index; and, by 2030, to establish at least 5 digital technology enterprises on par with the world's leading technology powers. By 2045, Vietnam should become a hub of the digital technology industry in the region and the world; rank among the world's top thirty in innovation and digital transformation; and establish advanced, cutting-edge digital infrastructure with massive capacity and ultra-broad bandwidth on par with global "digital empires" (To Lam, 2024d).

Regarding the development of the intellectual community itself, General Secretary To Lam emphasized that "by 2030, the Vietnamese intellectual community should produce 100 inventions, patents, and scientific works listed in global scientific rankings; scientific and technological products, as well as literary and artistic works, should reach the pinnacle of their fields; and at least 3 Vietnamese scientific journals should attain regional and international standards". He further noted that "by 2045, Vietnam's intellectual community should be the leading force in the region and rank among the world's top, with hundreds of scholars recognized for their global influence and awarded international prizes across various fields" (To Lam, 2024d).

These are highly challenging goals, first and foremost for the scientific community. On January 13, 2025, at Dien Hong Hall, the second National Conference on breakthroughs in science, technology, innovation, and digital transformation (first held in 1963 at Ba Dinh Hall) was held with 978,532 delegates attending both in person and online. In the role of Chair of the Central Steering Committee, General Secretary To Lam presented strategic ideas on leveraging science to advance the era of national rise (To Lam, 2025a).

In line with the spirit of transforming Resolution No. 57, issued by the Politburo on December 22, 2024, on *breakthroughs in science, technology, innovation, and national digital transformation* into a true "Resolution for the Liberation of Scientific Thought", General Secretary To Lam proposed 8 key tasks and solutions. Among them was the introduction of mechanisms to attract scientific and technological talents, particularly overseas Vietnamese and international experts. In 2025, he stressed that it is imperative to "remove all bottlenecks and barriers to development", put an end to the situation of "laying out the red carpet at the top while spreading nails at the bottom", as well as "short-termism, envy, and egalitarianism". A selection of institutes or universities will be piloted to invite external experts to take on leadership roles. As he explained, "in the past, those experts were hesitant to take up positions here because we were not truly ready, and administrative and regulatory barriers made management extremely difficult. Now, everything will be much easier and more conducive to effective governance". For 2025, he emphasized the need to allocate no less than 3% of the state budget to the development of science, technology,

innovation, and digital transformation, and to raise spending on science and technology to 2% of GDP over the following five years. At the same time, a thorough reform of funding allocation, management, and disbursement processes was required, eliminating the “request-grant mechanism” and cumbersome procedures to optimize resources and foster innovation (To Lam, 2025a).

In the application of science and technology, “breakthroughs and innovations serve as a magical, revolutionary force that overcomes barriers and limitations to achieve extraordinary and outstanding accomplishments”. “Breakthroughs must be pursued in both the natural and social sciences, which constitute boundless domains encompassing vast, untamed territories, offering abundant opportunities for intellectuals and scientists to “turn straw into gold” (To Lam, 2025a).

On January 15, 2025, at the 6th National Forum on the Development of Digital Technology Enterprises, General Secretary To Lam delivered a speech that drew significant public attention. He assessed that “Vietnam’s digital technology industry has become one of the country’s key economic sectors, making substantial contributions to development and enhancing Vietnam’s standing on the global digital technology map”. Yet, he candidly acknowledged that “With all our openness, receptiveness, and active listening, we must recognize that many shortcomings remain”. For example, “research and development capacity is still heavily dependent on foreign sources, the ability to attract high-tech talent remains insufficient, and the technological level of Vietnamese enterprises remains limited, occupying only a low position in the global supply chain” (To Lam, 2025b).

While many remain captivated with Vietnam’s recent achievements, General Secretary To Lam frankly underscored the discrepancy between the “impressive, spectacular, and supposedly pride-inducing” international rankings in terms of exports of components, computers, phones, and software, and the actual situation in Vietnam. He remarked, “I keep asking myself whether this amounts to “misperception”, “self-deception”, or “slipping into complacency”. I want to make these shortcomings explicit so that we squarely confront the reality of where our enterprises stand in the global value chain and in international competitiveness, and thereby striving to advance” (To Lam, 2025b).

Setting forth the 7 key tasks for Vietnam to fully leverage the potential of digital technology, General Secretary To Lam emphasized, “This is an opportune moment for Vietnamese enterprises to build a sustainable future for the country’s digital technology sector”. He further stated, “By 2030, to position Vietnam among the top three leading countries in Southeast Asia in digital technology research and development, and to foster at least five major digital technology enterprises with global competitiveness” (To Lam, 2025b). In fact, digital technology and the actual implementation of national digital transformation are among the areas in which Vietnam has been highly valued by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)”. Therefore, General Secretary To Lam emphasized the need to “harness strengths in intellectual capacity, human resources, and the spirit of creative entrepreneurship, together with the indomitable Vietnamese spirit, to contribute to the country’s robust advancement in the new era (To Lam, 2025b).

### **3. The essence of development, determination for and faith in the new era of growth**

The aforementioned impressive milestones, together with the dynamic momentum currently unfolding in social life, such as “the revolution of streamlining the state apparatus”, downsizing state personnel, restoring growth momentum to enable the economy to achieve double-digit growth, implementing the *Khoán 10*<sup>1</sup> reform in science through Resolution No. 57, and enforcing Decree No. 168 on traffic violation penalties, represent the initial drivers ushering in the new era of development - the era of national rise.

In the coming period, political theorists will likely engage in further debates on the “new era of development - the era of Vietnam’s rise”, seeking to define its essence and the potential scientific, political, and social implications of this concept. Admittedly, it would be difficult to achieve complete satisfaction in treating the “era of national rise” as possessing the same conceptual rigor as notions such as the “biological era” or the “social age” in academic disciplines. Yet, its plausibility becomes evident when viewed in light of its alignment with the remarkable stages of development observed worldwide, for example, the “take-off phase” of nations that “turned into dragons” and emerged as newly industrialized countries (NICs) in recent decades.

In line with the speeches delivered by General Secretary To Lam, this is, first

and foremost, the term for a new stage of development - a phase of exceptionally vigorous breakthroughs for Vietnam, beginning with the 14th National Congress of the Party in 2026. The concept embodies determination for development, the aspiration for progress, faith in the near future, and Vietnam’s strategic resolve. The “era of national rise” is a symbolic notion, reflecting the objective dynamic of Vietnamese society after having accumulated substantial resources over more than 40 years of *Doi Moi*.

This objective dynamic, however, would fall out of reach without a firm determination for development. The “top priority” of the new era, as emphasized by the General Secretary, is the uncompromising fulfillment of the strategic goals set for 2030 and 2045.

The “strategic orientation” of this era of national rise begins with a “bold renewal of leadership methods and enhancement of governing capacity” by the ruling Party. The “first step” entails a “revolution of streamlining the state apparatus” and a “dramatic breakthrough in institutions” - addressing the “bottleneck of bottlenecks”. It also requires resolutely overcoming the risk of backwardness and the middle-income trap: A stage in which a country is no longer poor enough to endure austerity, yet not wealthy enough to eliminate irrationalities, upgrade technology, and optimize social life (Khalidi, 2023).

The General Secretary further highlighted that the “golden key”, the “vital factor” for “breaking through the middle-income trap and realizing the nation’s aspiration for strength and prosperity”, lies in science and technology, innovation, and digital transformation. With conviction, he declared: “We must learn how to stand on

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<sup>1</sup> Translator’s note: “*Khoán 10*” was modeled after the landmark 1988 agricultural reform that granted farming households production autonomy, and has been subsequently adapted to confer similar autonomy and responsibility upon research institutions and scientists.

the shoulders of giants” (To Lam, 2025a). Thus, the era of national rise - conceived as “an era of affluence, development, and prosperity of the Vietnamese nation” - is essentially a phase of accelerated and breakthrough growth, with the ultimate goal of prosperous people, a strong nation, democracy, justice, civilization, freedom, and happiness, in accordance with the model of an ideal society.

Politically, it endeavors to ignite the latent aspiration for development within the spiritual life of society, awakening the dream of all social strata to “stand on an equal footing with great powers of the five continents”. Institutionally, it aims to dismantle bottlenecks across all socio-economic activities, reform development governance, and renew the Party’s leadership methods so that inclusiveness increasingly characterizes the institutional framework, while minimizing the influence of implicit institutions. Theoretically, it calls for a mindset that is neither rigidly doctrinaire nor overly scholastic, but truly regarding the reality as the ultimate criterion of truth.

In the global context, Vietnam in this new era is positioned to “stand on an equal footing with the great powers of the five continents”.

#### **4. A unique moment to realize the new era of development**

The “era of national rise” has long represented a cherished aspiration across successive generations of Vietnamese forebears. In the 1990s, the prospect of becoming an industrialized nation appeared tantalizingly close for Vietnam, yet it remained unrealized. During that period, several other ASEAN countries were likewise anticipated to become the next generation of Newly Industrialized

Countries (NICs); however, their growth subsequently slowed, and pressing social challenges emerged as the global context abruptly turned less favorable in the aftermath of the East Asian financial crisis.

In this light, beyond the remarkable trajectories of the so-called “Asian Dragons”, few middle-income nations have successfully attained breakthrough development.

For Vietnam, “foundations for positioning” this new stage of development lies in the tangible achievements accumulated over 40 years of Đổi Mới reforms with sufficient strategic standing and capacity to make a decisive breakthrough, no longer constrained by the earlier state of “powerlessness to realize its aspirations”. Vietnam is among the countries quickly keeping pace with the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the latest advances in artificial intelligence. Since 2020, Vietnam has been recognized among countries with “high human development” (HDI > 0.700). The period of a young population, characterized by the so-called “golden population structure”, which began in 2007 and will conclude a few years after 2030, accounts for 64% of the working-age population and provides the country with a substantial workforce that is still capable of driving significant economic transformation. As of 2023, Vietnam’s population exceeds 100 million, ranking among the three most populous countries in Southeast Asia, eight in Asia, and fifteen worldwide. This youthful population also boasts relatively high educational attainment: 96% are literate, and the proportion with higher education continues to rise (UNDP, 2024: 275). Female labor participation is among the highest in the

region (General Statistics Office, 2024). A new generation of leaders exhibits technocratic thinking, practical experience, and strategic vision. Furthermore, Vietnamese people are recognized by the Institute of Economic Affairs (University of Buckingham, UK) for their strong drive for success and dynamic economic engagement, surpassing that of nearly all the seven European and four Asian countries in the survey. The proportion of people who harbor prejudice against the rich is very low, at only 19%, slightly higher than Japan's 14% (Zitelmann, 2022).

Taken together, Vietnam today is at a unique moment to realize the new era of development the "era of national rise" - in harmony with the progress of the times.

## 5. Conclusion

The era of national rise in Vietnam, closely associated with the role of General Secretary To Lam, embodies the country's strong aspiration for development in the coming period. Both domestic and international public opinion, political and social activists, as well as numerous international organizations, have recognized and highly valued this aspiration, alongside Vietnam's successes over recent years, building on the achievements initiated during the Đổi Mới reforms.

The goal of becoming a developed, high-income country by the middle of the century requires Vietnam to renew its management model, reform institutions, promote growth, and vigorously develop science, technology, and innovation. The strategic vision of the "era of national rise" serves as an ideational foundation for realizing these objectives.

After nearly 40 years of Doi Moi, Vietnam today is a stable yet dynamic society: a

population exceeding 100 million, diligent, industrious, well-educated, and driven by strong determination for progress; an economy marked by sustained, relatively high growth, ranked 36th globally and rapidly adapting to the digital world; and a generation of leaders with technocratic thinking, practical experience, and strategic vision. These are the necessary and sufficient factors enabling Vietnam to seize this unprecedented moment in its new stage of development, avoid the risk of falling behind, escape the middle-income trap, and rise confidently in the new era of development, in step with the progress of the times □

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