

Biden's visit to Vietnam attempts to tighten the noose around China

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US President Biden described his trip to Vietnam starting Sunday as a “historic moment” that took the relationship between the two countries to a “new elevated status that will be a force for prosperity and security.”

Nothing could be further from the truth. While Biden denied that US imperialism was engaged in a Cold War with China or was seeking to “contain” it, the purpose of his visit was to consolidate ties with Hanoi as part of Washington's offensive throughout the region in preparation for war against Beijing.

Biden's trip followed the G20 summit, in which the US and its allies suffered a humiliating failure in their efforts to insert language into the final communiqué condemning Russia, following the failure of the US-backed Ukrainian spring offensive.

Biden joined Nguyen Phu Trong, general secretary of the Vietnamese Communist Party, in signing a comprehensive security partnership which opens the door for closer economic and military collaboration between the two countries.

The partnership is not a formal military alliance, but it does place the US on the top tier of formal relations with Vietnam, on a par diplomatically with Russia and China, which already have such ties with Vietnam. Top Vietnamese leader Trong declared that the US-Vietnamese ties had grown by “leaps and bounds” and was now “elevated to a new height.”

While Vietnam has been cautious about alienating China, its number one trading partner, its close ties with the United States is an implicit warning to Beijing that it has other economic options. Prior to Biden's visit to Vietnam, Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning again called on the US to “abandon the Cold War mentality” in its diplomacy in Asia, and to “abide by the basic norms of international relations.”

The embrace of Washington by the Vietnamese Communist Party leadership is all the more pointed given the devastation wreaked on Vietnam by US imperialism during the Vietnam War. Millions of Vietnamese civilians

and soldiers were killed in the conflict and the impact of the war continues today as a result of the US military's blanket use of the poisonous defoliant Agenda Orange and extensive use of cluster bombs.

Moreover, the US forged a bloc with China against Soviet Union, encouraging Beijing to launch an invasion of northern Vietnam in a brief but bloody war in March 1979, just months after the US and China established formal diplomatic ties. Tens of thousands were killed on both sides in the conflict.

The Vietnamese Communist Party abandoned its socialist pretensions and turned to the capitalist market in 1986 with the elaboration of its Doi Moi program of pro-market reforms. In the wake of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Vietnam has turned ever more openly towards US imperialism which had maintained an economic blockade since the end of the Vietnam War in 1975.

Formal diplomatic relations were established under President Clinton in 1995 and expanded under President Obama. Now with the sealing of a comprehensive partnership, the Vietnamese leadership is clearly hoping to cash in on US efforts to establish alternative supply chains for crucial strategic supplies as it prepares for war with China.

As of 2022, the US was Vietnam's second largest trading partner after China, and Vietnam was the ninth largest of the United States. The joint statement between Biden and Trong noted that Vietnam had officially asked for a review of its status as a market economy on September 8, which the US will conduct as “expeditiously as possible.” Market economy status will open the way for wider American investment in Vietnam.

The US is looking to Vietnam as an alternative source of semi-conductors, vital not only in numerous commercial applications but also for military equipment. Conflict with China could severely disrupt supplies of semi-conductors, not only from China itself, but also from Taiwan which is the world's largest manufacturer, particularly of the most advanced computer chips.

The Biden administration is stoking a war with China over Taiwan by deliberately undermining the One China policy under which Washington de facto recognises Beijing as the legitimate government of all China, including Taiwan.

In his meeting yesterday with Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh, Biden announced a US-Vietnam Semiconductor Partnership. Biden and Chinh hailed the \$7.8 billion deal that Vietnam Airlines has signed with Boeing to buy 50 of its 737 Max passenger aircraft.

Biden and Secretary of State Antony Blinken also met with Chinh and top Vietnamese officials and business executives to discuss expanding technological and economic cooperation. Senior executives from top American corporations including Google, chipmakers Intel and GlobalFoundries and Boeing took part in the “innovation and investment summit.” Dell, Google, Microsoft and Apple have already invested heavily in Vietnam under conditions of deteriorating relations between the US and China.

In another significant strategic economic area, the comprehensive security partnership refers to expanding Vietnam’s production of rare earths that are critical for many commercial and military applications, including the manufacture of semi-conductors. China currently dominates the world’s production. Vietnam has the world’s second-largest deposits of rare earths after China.

While not discussed publicly, the US is undoubtedly seeking to strengthen military ties with Vietnam, which has longstanding territorial disputes with China in the South China Sea. While still at a limited level, the US has increased its exports of arms to Vietnam after lifting its ban on the sale of lethal weapons to the country.

The US under Obama, Trump, and Biden has provided Vietnam with 24 new coast guard patrol vessels, unmanned aircraft systems, coastal radar, and two decommissioned US Coast Guard Hamilton-class cutters, Vietnam’s largest coast guard ships. At the same time, US aircraft carriers have made port calls in Vietnam for the first time since the Vietnam War, most recently in June when the USS Ronald Reagan arrived in Danang accompanied by two guided-missile cruisers—USS Antietam and USS Robert Smalls.

Vietnam, however, remains heavily dependent on Russia for some 80 percent of its armaments and has long established relations. Hanoi has pointedly not condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine and is continuing to buy weapons from Russia, despite the risk of US sanctions. In his efforts to strengthen ties with Vietnam, Biden has turned a blind eye to its Russian arms purchases and his joint statement with Trong simply referred to the need for “a comprehensive, just, and durable peace” in the Ukraine war.

Biden’s signing of a comprehensive security partnership with Vietnam is part of far broader preparations for a US-led

war with China which includes:

- * A vast US military build-up and restructuring throughout the Indo-Pacific that began with the Obama administration and continued under Trump and Biden. By 2020, 60 percent of the US military’s air and naval assets were to be stationed in the region.

- * Strengthening anti-China Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or Quad, with Australia, Japan and India.

- * The AUKUS pact with Australia and Britain that will provide Australia with nuclear-powered attack submarines and other advanced weaponry. It includes a major expansion of basing arrangements that is transforming northern Australia into a huge military platform for war with China.

- * The expansion of US bases in the Philippines to include strategic areas of Luzon directly adjacent to the South China Sea—a major focus of US naval and air provocations against China.

- * The formalisation of close security relations between two major US allies in North East Asia—South Korea and Japan—that is essential to US war plans, not least because of major American bases and anti-missile sites in both countries.

- * The systematic strengthening of Washington’s strategic partnership with India.

Within this context, Vietnam has been identified a crucial strategic partner despite its relations with Russia and China, and the brutal history of the Vietnam War. Speaking prior to Biden’s visit, the White House national security advisor Jake Sullivan told a media briefing: “It reflects the leading role that Vietnam will play in our growing network of partnerships in the Indo-Pacific as we look to the future.”

Relations are likely to be further boosted when Biden welcomes Vietnamese Communist Party General Secretary Trong to San Francisco in November for a meeting of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum.



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