

Putin meets Vietnamese leaders as US accelerates military build-up in Asia

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24 June 2024

Following his visit to North Korea, Russian President Vladimir Putin traveled to Vietnam last week for a state visit on Thursday. Putin visited the region to try to counter efforts by Washington to isolate Moscow as the US and NATO ramp up their war against Russia in Ukraine.

In Hanoi, Putin met with Vietnamese President Tô Lâm and other senior officials, including General Secretary of the Vietnamese Communist Party Nguyễn Phú Trọng. The trip was Putin's fifth to Vietnam, the last being in 2017.

Putin and Lâm issued a statement to mark 30 years of "the Russian-Vietnamese Treaty on Principles of Friendly Relations." The two sides agreed to deepen ties, signing 11 agreements dealing with fields such as energy cooperation, oil and gas exploration, technology, and education. Putin hailed economic relations between Russia and Vietnam, pointing out that bilateral trade had grown by 8.3 percent in 2023, reaching \$US5 billion.

Moscow and Hanoi also agreed to expand military cooperation. Putin stated, "The discussion of the situation in the Asia-Pacific region showed mutual interest in building a reliable and adequate regional security architecture based on the principles of the non-use of force and a peaceful settlement of disputes, in which there will be no place for selective military-political blocs." Lâm added the pair would "further cooperate in defense and security to cope with non-traditional security challenges."

While stating that the agreement is "not directed against third countries," the two leaders are clearly concerned about rising geopolitical tensions in the region, driven above all by US imperialism. This is highlighted by recent clashes between Chinese and Philippine vessels around the Second Thomas Shoal in

the South China Sea, encounters fueled by Washington. They agreed to hold joint military drills, ostensibly aimed at improving rescue operations.

Lâm, conscious of the reaction that Putin's visit would generate in Washington, sought to emphasize that Vietnam was not lining up with any particular power while also maintaining longstanding ties with Moscow. "Vietnam has pursued an independent foreign policy of peace... but we attach importance to developing the traditional friendship and comprehensive strategic partnership with Russia and consider Russia as one of Vietnam's foreign policy priorities," he stated.

Such comments will not placate the US. Last September, President Biden visited Hanoi to sign a comprehensive security partnership, which opened the door for closer military and economic cooperation between the two countries. Like the Philippines, Vietnam also has territorial disputes with Beijing in the South China Sea, which Washington is seeking to exploit as part of its war drive against China.

Prior to his arrival in Vietnam, the US embassy in Hanoi denounced the Russian president's visit, stating that "no country should give Putin a platform to promote his war of aggression and otherwise allow him to normalize his atrocities." The Biden administration dispatched its Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Daniel Kritenbrink to Hanoi for a two-day visit only hours after Putin left the country.

Both legs of Putin's trip to Asia have drawn condemnations from the US and its allies who are seeking to further isolate Moscow as part of the US/NATO-instigated war in Ukraine.

Washington would not have been pleased by Putin's article for *Nhân Dân*, the official newspaper of the

Vietnamese Communist Party, which declared: “We are grateful to our Vietnamese friends for their balanced position on the Ukraine crisis and their desire to facilitate the search for practical ways to settle it peacefully.” Like China, Vietnam has refused to condemn Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

While Moscow’s invasion was entirely reactionary and aimed at defending the interests of the Russian oligarchs, the US and its NATO allies deliberately provoked the war by fomenting the 2014 coup that ousted the elected pro-Russian president and by moving to incorporate Ukraine into NATO.

In fact, Washington is increasingly working to spread the Ukraine war to the Indo-Pacific region, linking the efforts to overthrow Putin and carve up Russia with the ongoing attempts to provoke a war with China. The US has placed emphasis on improving relations with Vietnam in an effort to draw Hanoi away from Moscow and Beijing.

At the beginning of June, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky made an unannounced visit to the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore where he berated China for not lining up behind the US/NATO war against Russia. This was not only directed at Beijing, but other countries in the region, including Vietnam, that have attempted to take a neutral position in the conflict.

In a move no doubt made in close coordination with Washington, on Thursday, after Putin’s summit in Pyongyang, South Korea’s National Security Advisor Jang Ho-jin stated that Seoul was reconsidering its stance on supplying only “nonlethal” aid to Ukraine.

Jang stated, “We plan to reconsider the issue of arms support to Ukraine,” adding that “specific measures will be revealed later.” Seoul is already indirectly one of the largest suppliers of 155mm shells to Kiev—by replenishing US stocks so that shells can be provided to Ukraine—a fact revealed by the *Washington Post* late last year. Jang also pledged to further boost military cooperation with the US and Japan, a move that will increase tensions and which will ultimately be directed at China.

In response to Seoul, Putin warned that supplying additional weaponry “would be a very big mistake. I hope it will not happen. If it does, then we too will then make the respective decisions, which South Korea’s current leadership is unlikely to be pleased with.”

While in Vietnam, as in North Korea, Putin attempted to dress up his confrontation with the US and NATO in progressive-sounding phrases. He hailed the Soviet Union’s aid to Vietnam in its struggles against French and US imperialism in the 20th century, writing in *Nhân Dân*, “Our country significantly contributed to the heroic struggle of the Vietnamese people against foreign invaders.”

In reality, the Soviet Stalinist bureaucracy only aided the struggle of the Vietnamese people during the so-called Cold War to use it as a pawn in its dealings with imperialism. Putin is not leading an anti-imperialist struggle against the US, but desperately seeking diplomatic and economic support to counter the escalating US-NATO war to crush Russia and to subordinate it to imperialist interests.



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