

The Russia-Vietnam Strategic Partnership, Affects US Influence in Southeast Asia. “New Cold War Moves East”

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Russia is indirectly lending a helping hand to China as the center of the New Cold War moves from Europe to Asia.

The speculation among some about Vietnam’s future role in the US’ regional campaign to contain China was quashed as a result of [President Putin’s visit](#) to that Southeast Asian country. The Russian leader and his counterpart To Lam rejected the policy of creating “[selective military-political blocs](#)” in an allusion to [AUKUS+](#)/[“The Squad](#)”, which refers to the US’ emerging NATO-like network that includes Australia, Japan, the Philippines, and (informally) Taiwan. South Korea is expected to join them soon too.

President To Lam also pledged to [peacefully resolve regional disputes](#) without the use of force and threats, with the innuendo being that Vietnam won’t be the first to rekindle tensions with China over the East Sea/South China Sea. Likewise, he and President Putin [reaffirmed](#) that “We will not enter any unions or treaties with third countries hurting independence, sovereignty or territorial ties with each other”, thus hinting that Russia’s “no-limits” partnership with China does indeed have some very real limits.

It was therefore predictable that these decades-long strategic partners [promised](#) to “step up defense and security cooperation, and together we will fight challenges, new and old [to international stability].” The significance of these military-strategic statements is that they keep the US’ Southeast Asian influence in check since they show that there’s no longer any reason to speculate that Vietnam will ever request its assistance in balancing China since Russia will now be fully relied on to that end.

To be absolutely clear, Russia isn't "against China" or even indirectly seeking to "contain" it via Vietnam, **but it's a matter of diplomatic fact that Moscow supports Hanoi over Beijing in their maritime dispute.**

This long-time policy was most recently confirmed in a very diplomatic way when the two countries referenced the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea 1982 a total of three times in their "[Joint Statement on 2030 Vision for Development of Viet Nam-Russia Relations](#)" from December 2021.

This isn't Russia and China's only disagreement over a very sensitive issue, however, since they also have completely opposite approaches towards [India's claims to Kashmir](#) and particularly Delhi's ones over the Beijing-controlled region of Aksai Chin. They've nevertheless [responsibly managed](#) them in pursuit of the greater multipolar good and won't let these issues be exploited by the US for divide-and-rule purposes. Russia's strategic partnerships with China, India, and Vietnam do a lot to avert that scenario.

Moscow can always be called upon by both conflicting parties in any dispute to mediate between them in the event of a crisis if they have the political will to seek its recourse. Furthermore, from China's perspective, it's better for Russia to be India and Vietnam's top military-technical partner than the US, whose intention in selling high-end equipment to its partners is always to disrupt the balance of power. By contrast, Russia's is to maintain that balance in order to promote dialogue, which is always preferable.

As regards the Sino-Vietnamese maritime dispute, there was always the chance during the nadir of Russia's power after the Soviet Union's dissolution that the US would replace Moscow's role for Hanoi, but the Socialist Republic proudly retained its strategic autonomy and avoided that temptation. Its leadership knew better than to rely on their wartime enemy for security and correctly feared that coming under its influence would lead to the gradual erosion of its hard-earned sovereignty.

The problem though was that China became more assertive in its claims to the East Sea/South China Sea from the mid-2010s onwards, thus heightening Vietnam's threat perception. Beijing's behavior was driven by its belief that Washington was about to make a major move there as part of its "Pivot to Asia", which had to be preempted, but this inadvertently worsened relations with Hanoi for obvious reasons. It was around that time that speculation grew about Vietnam requesting the US' military aid against China.

Russia hadn't yet regained its lost strength but was well on the path to doing so, with this being apparent by the time that President Putin visited Vietnam in 2017 to attend [that year's APEC Summit](#). Flash forward four years to former Vietnamese President Nguyen Xuan Phuc's trip to Moscow where they agreed to the aforementioned 2030 partnership development plan and then to the present day where these two countries celebrated their newly reinvigorated strategic partnership.

This sequence of events shows that while Vietnamese-US relations greatly improved over the last three decades, with this process culminating in their [strategic partnership](#) that was clinched during Biden's visit last September, Vietnam never became a US vassal. It always kept the Pentagon at arm's length, and for good reason when remembering the countless war crimes that it committed, which created the opportunity for Russia to finally restore its traditional role in [Vietnam's balancing act](#).

Vietnam's political and economic ties with the US will remain strong, notwithstanding Washington's [ridiculous rebuke](#) of Hanoi for hosting President Putin, but there's no longer even the remotest possibility that it'll ever rely on its new strategic partner's armed forces for balancing China. Russia will once again be fully relied on to that end, which should make Sino-Vietnamese tensions much more manageable than if Vietnam became the new Philippines by relying entirely on the US instead.

In the context of the US' "[Pivot \(back\) to Asia](#)", which is unfolding ahead of the inevitable end of the [Ukrainian Conflict](#) and the US' subsequently renewed focus on containing China, this outcome precludes Vietnam's cooperation with AUKUS+/"The Squad". That'll importantly help relieve some pressure along China's southern front so long as Beijing doesn't saber-rattle against Hanoi, which it's not expected to anyhow since its hands are already full with the Philippines and [possibly soon with Northeast Asia too](#).

By checking US influence in Southeast Asia through the new invigoration of its strategic partnership with Vietnam, Russia is therefore indirectly lending a helping hand to China as the center of the [New Cold War](#) moves from Europe to Asia. Although not coordinated with China, this can still be regarded as yet another manifestation of the [Sino-Russo Entente](#), albeit with very well-defined limits seeing as how President Putin reaffirmed that he won't enter into agreements with others that could harm Vietnam.

In practice, this means that while Russia's military relations with China will continue to grow, under no circumstances will Moscow betray Hanoi by taking Beijing's side in their dispute. The Kremlin also won't ever commit to a mutual defense treaty with China like the one that it just clinched with North Korea, which would obligate Russia to support China if it clashes with Vietnam. The Sino-Vietnamese balance of power will consequently be maintained and hopefully lead to a future political solution to their dispute.

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