

Thayer Consultancy
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Background Brief:

Vice President Harris' Visit to Vietnam: Post-Mortem 2

Carlyle A. Thayer

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We request an assessment of Vice President Kamala Harris' trip to Vietnam.

Q1. What is notable about this visit? What are the new developments that have occurred in U.S. - Vietnam bilateral relations?

ANSWER: Two developments in particular stand out as a result of Vice President Kamala Harris' visit to Vietnam and her meetings with Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh President Nguyen Xuan Phuc.

First, that U.S. will increase its support and cooperation with Vietnam to combat COVID-19 in the immediate term as well as work together to meet the challenge of infectious diseases in the future. The main development was the U.S. decision to establish and fund a regional Center for Diseases Control and Prevention in Hanoi to serve Southeast Asia. This centre has several functions including public health, medical research and training.

Second, Vietnam and the United States will give priority to economic relations as the foundation for strengthening and elevating their comprehensive partnership. This is a two-way street. Vietnam will take steps to create favourable conditions for U.S. companies to do business in Vietnam. And Vietnam's Vingroup will invest in electric vehicle and batteries to assist in balancing to a certain extent bilateral trade and investment.

Q2. How useful/effective is this visit? What did it achieve?

ANSWER: This visit was immensely useful to restore trust in bilateral relations after the unilateral actions of the Trump Administration. While Vice President Kamala Harris did touch on defence and security cooperation and call on Vietnam to join the U.S. in pressuring China to observe international law, the main thrust of her visit was on strengthening overall cooperation within the framework of the 2013 comprehensive partnership.

Vice President Harris' support for cooperation across a broad front with Vietnam (and Singapore prior to her visit) opens new possibilities for the U.S. to work with individual Southeast Asian states as well as ASEAN and ASEAN-multilateral institutions. In sum, Vice President Harris opened the door wider for regional cooperation that is mutually beneficial and does not force nations to take sides in China-U.S. strategic rivalry.

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