

Thayer Consultancy
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Background Brief:

Vietnam-U.S.- Relations

May 9, 2022

As reported, Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh will visit the United States shortly. We request your appreciation of the following issues:

Q1. Current and future Viet Nam-US relations

ANSWER: Vietnam-United States bilateral relations currently are quite good now that Ambassador Marc Knapper has taken up his post in Hanoi. Ambassador Knapper has been quite active since his arrival, especially in meeting high-level officials, and preparing for Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh's meeting with President Joe Biden, working visit to the United States, and attendance at the 2nd U.S. ASEAN Special Leaders' Summit.

The future of U.S.-Vietnam relations largely will be dependent on the meeting between President Biden and Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh. Vice President Kamala Harris, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin and Ambassador Marc Knapper have all raised the desirability of raising relations to a strategic partnership.

Q2. Vietnam's role in ASEAN in general and at US-ASEAN Summit in particular

ANSWER: Vietnam, because it is politically stable and has a strategic vision, probably plays a more constructive role in ASEAN than some of its original founders. Vietnam is constructive and practical in trying to strengthen ASEAN, ASEAN-centrality and ASEAN-led mechanisms.

The U.S. ASEAN Summit is likely to focus on a number of issues ranging from regional health issues (mitigating COVID-19 pandemic and other infectious diseases, and building up the health infrastructure, and human resource development), post-COVID economic recovery, supply chains, digital economy, infrastructure, Mekong River development, and climate change. These are all priority areas for Vietnam and Vietnam is likely to support multilateral approaches to meeting these challenges.

Q3. Which topics will the US side want to discuss with the Vietnamese side during the Prime Minister Chinh's visit?

ANSWER: President will want to discuss continued U.S. support for COVID-19 mitigation and recovery (vaccines, pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, human resource development, and support for the CDC regional office); a new economic framework agreement covering digital trade, investment and U.S. market access; cyber security, and war legacy issues.

President Biden will raise foreign policy issues: a free and open Indo-Pacific, bilateral cooperation on maritime safety and security, Myanmar, and the war in Ukraine.

Q4. If the US invites Vietnam to engage in its free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy more deeply, how should Vietnam respond? Which fields should Vietnam join?

ANSWER: There are a number of issues that already overlap with U.S.-Vietnam and U.S.-ASEAN relations that are key to Biden's Indo-Pacific Strategy: transnational threats, health security, connectivity, regional prosperity through broad-based economic growth, secure supply chains, energy, transportation, climate change, and people to people linkages.

Once the Biden Administration announces its Indo-Pacific Economic Framework Vietnam should quickly engage with the U.S. to give this initiative some momentum.

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