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Background Briefing:

Vietnam: Chinese Warships Visit Cam Ranh Bay

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Vietnam state media cited the foreign affairs department of Khanh Hoa province as saying today that three Chinese warships will dock at Cam Ranh Bay this weekend for a four-day visit. This will be the first time Chinese navy will visit the naval base.

Just wonder if you have any words on this. Does its shows that bilateral ties are improving?

ANSWER: The first visit of three PLAN warships to Cam Ranh International Port is an illustration of Vietnam's policy of "diversification and multilateralization" of its external relations. The port was opened earlier this year and has been visited by warships from Singapore, Japan, India, France and the United States. This port is separate from the military port at Cam Ranh Bay where Vietnam berths its warships and Kilo-class submarines and where the Russian navy has special access. The visit of PLAN warships illustrates an improvement in relations following the HD 981 crisis in 2014. Vietnam and China began coordinated Coast Guard patrols in the Gulf of Tonkin in April 2006 that in recent years have witnessed reciprocal friendly port visits. The tenth joint patrol was conducted in September 2015.

It should be noted, however, that this is not the first time Chinese warships have visited Vietnam. In November 2001 a PLAN *Jiangwei II* guided missile frigate visited the port of Saigon and in November 2008 the PLAN training ship *Zheng He* also visited Ho Chi Minh City. Chinese warships have also visited other ports. In December 2009 the PLAN ships *Cheng Hai* and *Chao Yang* visited Haiphong and in November 2010 a PLAN frigate visited Da Nang.

The most recent visit by Chinese warships to Cam Ranh Bay follows an invitation by Vietnam in March of this year. After 2014 both sides moved to restore "political trust" through friendly military exchanges on their common border. These exchanges now involve meetings between their respective defense ministers. The PLAN visit to Cam Ranh International Port extends these confidence-building measures to the maritime domain.

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