

Thayer Consultancy
ABN # 65 648 097 123



Background Briefing:

Vietnam: What is the Purpose of Trump's Official Visit to Hanoi?

Carlyle A. Thayer

October 19, 2017

We request your assessment of President Trump's visit to Asia in November.

Q1 - What are President Trump's specific goals when he goes to Hanoi (after the APEC Summit in Da Nang)?

ANSWER: Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc was the first leader from Southeast Asia to be received by President Trump at the White House. Trump's decision to make an official visit to Vietnam after the APEC summit in Da Nang is an important commitment by him to further the comprehensive partnership between the United States and Vietnam and to recognize Vietnam as an important actor in regional affairs and a partner with the United States on many issues in common.

Q2 - What is the meaning of his visit for Vietnam and the region?

ANSWER: President Trump's visit to the region has two significant meanings. First, his visit will demonstrate that the United States will remain engaged in the Asia-Pacific and second, that the United States will continue to support the region's institutional architecture such as APEC, ASEAN and the East Asian Summit.

For President Trump U.S. engagement means reassurance to allies such as Japan and South Korea, who face a ballistic missile and nuclear threat from North Korea. At the same time, Trump will provide reassurance to regional states that partner with the United States. When President Trump visits Hanoi he will have met in the White House the government leaders from Vietnam, Malaysia, Thailand, and Singapore.

Q3 – What are the expected issues to be discussed by President Trump and with Vietnam's leaders?

ANSWER: Trump will promote the major areas of convergence in strategic outlook between Washington and Hanoi: non-nuclear proliferation on the Korean peninsula, regional economic liberalization based on high international standards, a rules-based order in the South China Sea including freedom of navigation and overflight, and cooperation in meeting the challenges of transnational crime, cyber security and counter-terrorism.

Q4 – Will Trump make any significant announcement on the US-Vietnam bilateral relationship?

ANSWER: The U.S. Administration has already announced that President Trump will address the APEC CEO summit. He will speak about open and free trade in the Asia-Pacific Region based on high international standards especially with respect to eliminating barriers to trade and investment and promoting e-commerce and digital trade. Trump will also support a special fund to build capacity to enable women to participate more in economic activities.

While in Hanoi, Trump and President Tran Dai Quang likely will issue a joint statement reaffirming their intention to enrich the comprehensive partnership. It is likely this joint statement will summarize progress made across a number of areas mentioned in the joint statement issued after Prime Minister Phuc's visit to Washington including contentious trade issues, defence and security cooperation, and U.S. support for Vietnam's involvement in UN peacekeeping missions. The meeting of the two presidents will offer an opportunity to make an announcement related to future activities such as cooperation in maritime security, outer space, and war legacy issues.

Suggested citation: Carlyle A. Thayer, "Vietnam: What is the Purpose of Trump's Official Visit to Hanoi?," *Thayer Consultancy Background Brief*, October 19, 2017. All background briefs are posted on Scribd.com (search for Thayer). To remove yourself from the mailing list type, UNSUBSCRIBE in the Subject heading and hit the Reply key.

Thayer Consultancy provides political analysis of current regional security issues and other research support to selected clients. Thayer Consultancy was officially registered as a small business in Australia in 2002.