

Washington pressures Vietnam against cable deal with China

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Reuters reported in late September that the United States was pressuring Vietnam to avoid dealing with China in its plans to build ten new undersea communications cables. The pressure campaign is part of Washington's ever mounting preparations for war.

Undersea cable communications are among the most vital infrastructure in all of global capitalism, tying the data of the world's economies together the internet. More than four hundred cables, running approximately 750,000 miles across the seafloor of the world, carry over 95 percent of all international internet communications. The data transmitted includes electronic banking transactions, secret military instructions, and every other imaginable human communication. Ten trillion dollars in transactions run through these cables every day.

Vietnam's existing undersea cable infrastructure is aging and has suffered multiple failures and outages since late 2022. Hanoi announced an ambitious plan to build ten new undersea cables by 2030. Reuters reported that "the effort would be one of the most significant expansions of undersea internet infrastructure by any emerging economy."

In January, US government officials and tech companies began pressuring Vietnam to rule out any deal with any Chinese cable-laying company, particularly HMN Technologies. One US anonymous official told Reuters they were engaged in "very hard lobbying" over the course of more than six meetings. China's foreign ministry said that the US lobbying pressure "blatantly violated international rules and business operations."

Washington supplied Vietnam with intelligence that it claimed demonstrated that Chinese cables would be susceptible to sabotage and espionage. This is the crux of the matter. It is the stuff of actual warfare, not

simply trade warfare, that underlies the US pressure campaign.

A US Naval Institute report in 2023 stated that undersea cables were not only vital to "sensitive diplomatic and military orders," but the "military net-centric warfare relies on undersea cable operability." The very ability to carry out modern warfare depends upon control of this infrastructure. Cable owners, the report warned, could insert "back doors" for surveillance and deny access to data in a conflict.

Washington is engaged in a global campaign, of which the pressure on Vietnam is a part, to prevent HMN and other Chinese firms from laying long-distance data cables anywhere in the world, because they argue that Chinese control of data cables would allow easier access for Chinese government surveillance and possible disruption of communications.

What Washington protests as a Chinese threat, is what the United States is already doing. Edward Snowden revealed a decade ago that United States intelligence was engaged in the wholesale collection and surveillance of all internet data passing through the cables of US telecommunications companies, through a program, among others, called Prism.

An article in the *Princeton Journal of Public and International Affairs* published in September, wrote: "With its actions, the United States is breaking down a global network and creating two separate and disconnected spheres of data cables."

In preparation for war with China, Washington is carving up the world into strategic blocs. Rather than protecting the world's data infrastructure, which is best served through international collaboration, the United States is preparing for its disruption.

According to Reuters, the Vietnamese government at

present remained unconvinced by the US pitch.

Vietnam has for the past decade attempted to carve its own course in diplomatic relations, balancing between China and the United States, without falling into either camp. As Washington with ever greater intensity prepares for war with China, this balancing act has become increasingly impossible.

China remains Vietnam's largest trading partner; the United States is second. The United States seeks in Vietnam not only a military ally in its drive against China, but also an economic platform that can displace US dependency upon mass production in China as well as the strategically vulnerable Taiwan.

In September 2023, US President Joe Biden traveled to Vietnam and announced the elevation of US-Vietnamese relations to the level of Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Last week, General Secretary of the Vietnamese Communist Party Tô Lâm visited the United States for the UN General Assembly, and met with executives of Google, Apple, and the social media giant, Meta. All discussed expanding investments in Vietnam.

But despite the increasing economic integration of Vietnam with the United States, Vietnam maintains close relations with China and Russia as well. Along with China, Vietnam refused to condemn Russia's attack on Ukraine. Vladimir Putin made a state visit to Hanoi in June.

Among the many barriers to Washington's crusade to integrate Vietnam into its war drive against China is that of history. The US war against Vietnam was among the most barbaric in the 20th century and the country still bears its scars.

US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin issued a statement on September 9, the first anniversary of the elevation of US-Vietnamese relations to Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. His statement attempted to present how much progress had been made in relations over the past year, but it revealed that Washington is still scraping up the residue of its war crimes.

Austin trumpeted the fact that the United States was making progress toward removing dioxin from the soil at Bien Hoa airbase. Vietnam, in other words, is still poisoned with Agent Orange. The United States was working to remove unexploded ordinance, he said; again a legacy of US imperialism. He reported that the

single largest US overseas disability aid program goes to Vietnam. This is because the country was maimed and mangled by US bombs, and still bears these scars.



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