China Completes Vietnam Metro as US Accuses Beijing of “Bullying” Region

The Vietnamese capital city of Hanoi - home to over 8 million people - saw the opening of its first ever metro line. The line was financed and built by China and features rolling stock from China’s state-owned CRRC.

The metro was under construction starting in 2011 and was the target of criticism particularly in the West for being behind schedule and over budget.

Yet upon opening, residents of Hanoi clamored to be the first to ride the city’s new mass transit system.

The project’s completion might take some by surprise, particularly if they follow Western media and believe Vietnam is an adversary of China or that the Southeast Asian state, once the target of a vicious two decades-long war waged against it by the United States, is now joined together with Washington in their common purpose of “standing up” to China.

Yet nothing could be further from the truth. The notion that China is a regional “bully” evaporates with the slightest breeze of truth, and all that’s left is the fact that Vietnam and China - despite their many differences - are building a constructive future together.

Vietnam and China Are Closer Than You Might Think

Hanoi’s metro system is not the first Chinese rail-related project Vietnam has benefited from.

Also very recently, China completed a tunnel as part of a high-speed rail line that will help connect China to ASEAN via Vietnam. This is in addition to another line recently completed running through landlocked Laos.
Constructions for a high-speed railway in South China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region that would allow Chinese high-speed trains to reach the China-Vietnam border have made major progress, as all the tunnels have been drilled through.

Once completed, the railway, which connects cities of Fangchenggang and Dongxing located at the China-Vietnam border, will play a major role in railway connectivity between China and members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

This is in addition to efforts earlier this year leading to the first shipments from Vietnam making use of the China-Europe freight railway. Europe is the third largest region for Vietnamese exports and additional freight services to bring goods to European markets helps expand Vietnam’s economy.

It is China through its Belt and Road Initiative and its cooperation with neighboring nations like Vietnam that is making this possible.

In terms of trade, China not only helps facilitate the movement of Vietnamese goods globally, China itself is also Vietnam's largest export market.

Despite the sometimes heated political rhetoric emanating from certain circles within Vietnamese society aimed toward China, the country like so many others in Southeast Asia counts China as a key trading partner, an indispensable partner in not only building complex infrastructure projects, but also increasingly in terms of financing these projects.

Is China Really a Regional “Bully?”

Earlier this year when US Vice President Kamala Harris made her historic trip to Vietnam, she would - according to CNBC - claim:

We need to find ways to pressure and raise the pressure, frankly, on Beijing to abide by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and to challenge its bullying and excessive maritime claims.

Depicting China as a regional “bully” has been a central pillar in Washington’s propaganda war against China and one of several reasons the US uses to justify its ongoing military presence in not only the South China Sea specifically, but in the Indo-Pacific region in general.

Through synergies with other propaganda spread by Washington against China, the world is being divided into those falling for these claims, and those who are aware these are merely claims, made amid an unprecedented struggle by the West to maintain hegemony over a world soon to shift its center of power to the East.

Harris’ attempt to recruit Vietnam in “pressuring” Beijing - keeping in mind China and Vietnam’s trade and ongoing infrastructure cooperation - was done in vain.

At the same time Vice President Harris made her comments, the government of Vietnam had already met with its Chinese counterparts to assure them the two nations sought amicable relations and that Harris’ visit would not/did not alter Vietnam's position.

Despite all of these facts, the mantra of China “bullying” the rest of Asia continues to be repeated across the Western media and within the halls of power in Washington, London, and now Canberra.

The assembly of the “AUKUS” alliance - composed of nations clearly either on the fringes of the Indo-Pacific or entirely on the other side of the planet from it - is a clear reflection of just how little sense it makes to claim China is “bullying” the rest of Asia. Were China truly a bully and a threat to the region, AUKUS would have had many more members lining up to join. It does not. The reality is that the United States - because of its irrational fixation with encircling and containing China - poses the only actual threat to peace and prosperity in the region.

Harris in August came to Vietnam attempting to sell the United States as a security guarantor for a threat that does not exist, COVID assistance that amounted to a political token, and discussions about US-Vietnamese trade. Of these
three issues, only the latter is of real interest for Vietnam with the US as Vietnam’s second largest export market after China.

Vietnam has attempted to use Washington’s desperation to cling to regional hegemony in order to carve out for itself the best possible terms in dealing with both Washington and Beijing, all while trying to maintain access to US markets. Beyond this, it is clear Vietnam has no interest in actually joining the US in its self-engineered confrontation with Beijing.

Looking at the progress China and Vietnam are making in terms of trade, infrastructure, and cooperation benefiting greatly from China’s proximity to Vietnam - does the US through its current approach in the Indo-Pacific region believe five years or even a decade into the future its influence will be greater or further diminished?

It seems very obvious that Washington’s pursuit of hegemony is a historical cul-de-sac, and until the US shifts to a more realistic and constructive role among all other nations rather than above them, the US has no viable future in the Indo-Pacific or anywhere else upon the global stage.

*Brian Berletic is a Bangkok-based geopolitical researcher and writer, especially for the online magazine “New Eastern Outlook”.*