

U.S.-Vietnam Relations: Milestones and Major Events



Bilateral ties between the United States and Vietnam have deepened and matured in the fifteen years since the normalization of diplomatic relations in 1995. Our relationship continues to grow, based on friendship, mutual respect, and cooperation on a wide range of issues and with a view to the long-term interests of both countries.

President Bill Clinton announced the formal normalization of diplomatic relations with the Socialist Republic of Vietnam on July 12, 1995. Subsequent to President Clinton's normalization announcement, in August 1995, both nations upgraded their Liaison Offices opened in January 1995 to embassy status. As diplomatic ties between the nations grew, the United States opened a consulate general in Ho Chi Minh City, and Vietnam opened a consulate general in San Francisco. In 2009, Vietnam opened a consulate in Houston; the United States received permission to open a consulate in Danang.

Early Days

The earliest point of engagement with Vietnam began in our discussions over the search for Missing in Action. Momentum toward the opening of relations quickened in July 1993, when the United States dropped its objections to bilateral and multilateral lending to Vietnam. In February 1994, following Vietnamese cooperation on POW/MIA issues, President Clinton removed the longstanding trade embargo on Vietnam. For the initial years, progress in bilateral relations centered on efforts to achieve a full accounting for U.S. servicemen missing in action, as well as increasing health and medical assistance (see separate fact sheets on JPAC and health diplomacy). Trade relations advanced significantly in March 1998, when President Clinton granted a Jackson-Vanik waiver to Vietnam, which was required as part of an annual Congressional review of Vietnam's normal trading rights.

2000: A Turning Point

U.S.-Vietnam ties took a major step forward on **July 13, 2000**, when the United States and Vietnam signed a **Bilateral Trade Agreement**. This agreement, which went into force in December 2001, not only fundamentally altered U.S.-Vietnam economic ties, spurring trade and investment and bolstering Vietnam's own efforts to liberalize its economy, but changed the tenor of the bilateral relationship as a whole. Along with increased economic engagement came an increase in tourism and cultural and educational exchanges. The most visible sign of a revitalized relationship came in November 2000, when President Clinton became the first U.S. President to visit Vietnam since the end of the war. His four-day visit was met by enormous crowds of well-wishers in both Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City and marked a turning point for many in both countries.



During his November 2000 visit, President Clinton joined in the search for the remains of a lost airman.

From "Normalizing" to Normal

U.S. relations with Vietnam have become increasingly cooperative and broad-based over the past decade, propelled by a series of bilateral summits, including President George W. Bush's visit to Hanoi in November 2006, President Nguyen Minh Triet's visit to Washington in June 2007, and Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung's visits to Washington in June 2008 and April 2010. In 2003, the two countries signed

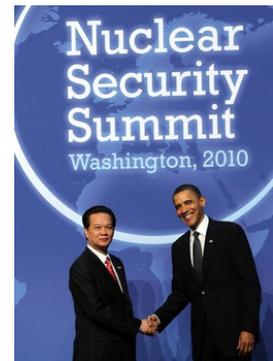


President Bush Joins World leaders at the 2006 APEC Summit in Hanoi.

a Counternarcotics Letter of Agreement (amended in 2006), a Civil Aviation Agreement, and a textile agreement. In January 2007, Congress approved Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR) for Vietnam, which paved the way for Vietnam to join the World Trade Organization. In 2006, after a two-year hiatus, the two countries resumed an annual dialogue on human rights, a continuing source of strong disagreement in the relationship. In October 2008, the U.S. and Vietnam inaugurated annual political-military talks and policy planning talks to consult on regional security and strategic issues. Bilateral and regional diplomatic engagement continued during Vietnam's two-year term on the UN Security Council and at ASEAN, which Vietnam chairs this year.

Today and Tomorrow

Bilateral relations are arguably at their highest point since relations were reestablished in 1995, and the fundamentals are in place to build a more enduring, comprehensive partnership. The United States remains Vietnam's largest export market and third-largest overall trade partner, and in 2009 jumped to first position among foreign investors. **Two-way trade in 2009 reached \$15.4 billion.** When bilateral relations normalized, there were fewer than 800 Vietnamese studying in the United States; today there are more than 13,000, a figure that has tripled in the last three years. Since 2004, the United States has provided Vietnam \$420 million in total HIV assistance through the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and is the largest donor in the fight against pandemic and avian influenza. We have provided more than \$46 million in aid for Vietnamese with disabilities, without regard to the cause of their disability, and over the past three years have allocated \$6 million for dioxin mitigation and related disabilities support, with an additional \$3 million appropriated in 2010. And we have boosted cooperation in areas that would have been considered too sensitive even five years ago, such as peacekeeping operations and training, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, maritime security, counterterrorism and counternarcotics cooperation, border security, and nonproliferation. Even in areas where the United States continues to voice strong disagreement -- human rights -- we are committed to expressing our concerns while working constructively to bring about positive change.



President Obama Greets Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung at the Nuclear Security Summit in Washington D.C. April 12, 2010

All told, the United States and Vietnam have come a remarkably long way in fifteen short years and can be proud of their achievements. Where there was once deep-seated mutual distrust, there is now an active partnership based on mutual goals, respect and cooperation.