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# United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6050

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May 20, 2016

Secretary General Nguyen Phu Trong  
1A Hung Vuong, Ba Dinh  
Ha Noi  
Viet Nam

Dear General Secretary Trong:

I look forward to continuing to work with you in your role as General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam. Your historic trip to Washington, D.C. last July was an important step in this process, and I was pleased to have the chance to host you and your delegation.

As we discussed last July, I believe Vietnam and the United States share a host of strategic and economic interests, including strengthening an open regional trading order, maintaining a favorable balance of power in the Asia-Pacific region, and upholding long-standing principles of world order, such as freedom of the seas and the peaceful resolution of international disputes.

I hope we can work together on a number of other initiatives in the coming years that can strengthen our security relationship. First, I am committed to helping build the maritime capacity of the Vietnamese Coast Guard and Navy. To this end, the United States must continue to work with partners like Vietnam to enhance maritime information sharing and response capabilities throughout the South China Sea. I am happy to report that over the last year the Senate Armed Services Committee has led the way in creating the Maritime Security Initiative, a half-billion dollar effort that will work alongside the U.S. State Department's Foreign Military Financing program to improve the capabilities of countries like Vietnam.

Second, the United States needs to help provide the Vietnamese Armed Forces with the ability to operate more effectively on, above, and within your territorial waters by finally removing the prohibition on the sale of lethal military equipment to the Government of Vietnam. This symbolic ban of weapon sales is a product of our past history and an inhibitor of our future relationship. I believe that we cannot ask our partners to contribute more while continuing to take steps that limit the level of their contribution. I therefore look forward to the full lifting of the arms ban during the President's trip later this month.

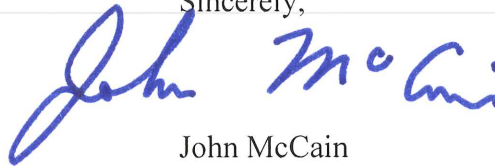
Finally, alongside our increased security assistance and the lifting of the arms ban, I believe the time has come for the Vietnam People's Navy and the United States Pacific Fleet to launch a more sustained U.S.-Vietnam Maritime Initiative. On one level this could include increasing the level of dialogue and exchanges between our two navies, welcoming Vietnam to join the Rim of the Pacific exercise, and increasing International Military Education and Training (IMET) and

Expanded-IMET programs for Vietnamese military officers. This initiative could also seek to expand the number of port visits that U.S. naval vessels can make to Vietnam each year as well as our at-sea exercise program. If our two governments could cooperate on this proposal, I would welcome the opportunity to again visit Vietnam to help launch this important effort.

As we continue to enhance our security partnership, the United States expects Vietnam to continue its progress on human rights and respect for civil society, including its respect for advocates of religious freedom, press freedom, and labor rights who seek to use peaceful means to build a strong and prosperous Vietnam. Over nearly two decades, Vietnam and the United States have built a strong relationship based on common goals and shared interests. We hope in the years to come to be able to build a strategic partnership based on shared values as well – for that is the closest, strongest, and most enduring friendship two nations can have.

I look forward to working with you to achieve these goals together and to visiting you in Vietnam again in the near future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John McCain". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

John McCain  
Chairman