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## An Upbeat Rumsfeld and Vietnam Agree to Broaden Ties

By [MICHAEL R. GORDON](#)

HANOI, June 5 — The United States and Vietnam agreed today to increase their military contacts and to discuss additional ways to broaden their defense cooperation, American officials said.

The understanding was sealed in talks between senior Vietnamese officials and [Donald H. Rumsfeld](#), who was making his first official visit to Vietnam as defense secretary.

The two nations, Mr. Rumsfeld declared with evident satisfaction early this evening, had decided to step up "exchanges at all levels of the military."

Vietnam was an important stop on an Asian swing that has already taken Mr. Rumsfeld to a meeting of defense experts in Singapore. During the Singapore sessions, Mr. Rumsfeld denounced Iran as a "terrorist" nation, complained that Russia was bullying its neighbors and criticized China for being secretive about its level of military spending.

In Hanoi, by contrast, the defense secretary heaped praise repeatedly on his hosts. He lauded Vietnam's economic development, which he inspected during a walk late Sunday evening through the streets of Hanoi.

"I was, and remain, struck by the economic success that you can see, and the activity and the change in this city," said Mr. Rumsfeld, who noted that he had previously visited the country as a congressman and private citizen.

During a visit to Vietnam's Temple of Literature, which was established in 1076 as Vietnam's first university, Mr. Rumsfeld enthusiastically struck a ritual gong. When Vietnam founded the university, Mr. Rumsfeld told Vietnam's defense minister, Pham Van Tra, native Americans in the United States were still living in "mud huts"

"That's impressive," Mr. Rumsfeld said of Vietnam's advanced vision in learning.

For their part, the Vietnamese greeted their guest with a resplendent military honor guard, which played the Star-Spangled Banner before the talks began at Vietnam's defense ministry.

The Vietnam War — which ended in 1975 — still casts a long shadow, however. There are 1,805 United States troops unaccounted for from the war, including 1,376 in Vietnam, according to American military officials.

A small team from the United States is based in Vietnam to carry out the accounting and excavating efforts, which have become complicated by Vietnam's building boom and the dwindling ranks of witnesses from that era. Vietnam has generally been cooperative, and Mr. Rumsfeld encouraged the government to provide additional support.

But it is China — a subject that Mr. Rumsfeld said went unmentioned during his talks today with Mr. Tra and Prime Minister Phan Van Khai — that has added impetus for the new courtship.

The Pentagon has been increasingly concerned over China's growing military strength. And Vietnam has its own reasons for trying to establish more balance with its neighbor to the north.

Still, the Vietnamese have moved deliberately. "They have China next door to them and they're careful to keep good relations with China and they want a balance in relations with us and relations with China," said a senior Pentagon official, who asked not to be identified because discussions between Vietnam and the United States are largely confidential.

One step in the still-evolving relationship will be taken later this month when two Vietnamese officers are scheduled to begin English- language training at a United States military language school in San Antonio, Texas. The instruction program — previously agreed — is being funded by the Pentagon's program for International Military Education and Training

A likely next step is the expansion of that effort to include medical training for Vietnamese officers, a Pentagon official suggested. American officials also said today there was discussion of expanded cooperation in clearing mines left behind from the Vietnam War.

One American official said that Vietnamese officials expressed interested in acquiring American demining equipment and military spare parts. That could be controversial in the [United States Congress](#), where Vietnam's record on human rights has come under close scrutiny.

During his discussions today with Mr . Tra, Mr. Rumsfeld suggested that Vietnam might play a role in

international peacekeeping. Mr. Tra noted that the Vietnamese military could not take part in any operation not specifically approved by the [United Nations](#), according to an American official who did not want to be named because of the private nature of the talks.

Access to Vietnamese ports and bases for American military forces was not on the agenda, Mr. Rumsfeld indicated before his visit.

Mr. Rumsfeld was not the first American defense secretary to visit Vietnam since the end of the Vietnam War: President Clinton's defense secretary, William Cohen, made the trip, as did Mr. Clinton.

The Vietnamese prime minister visited the United States in June 2005, the first such visit since the end of the Vietnam war. Vietnam, which signed an important trade agreement with the United States in 2000, has been pushing for membership in the [World Trade Organization](#). President Bush is expected to visit Vietnam when it hosts an Asian economic summit in November .

Still, the visit of the hard-line Mr. Rumsfeld was noteworthy, as was his enthusiasm. Mr. Rumsfeld noted that during the prime minister's meeting last year with President Bush the two leader talked about their desire to raise the relationship between the two countries to a new level.

"And certainly that has happened," Mr. Rumsfeld said.

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