

Putin didn't want diplomacy, U.S. tells neutral Vietnam

Senior State Department official to share details of failed talks with Moscow

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HO CHI MINH CITY -- Wendy Sherman, the No. 2 official in the U.S. State Department, vowed to share with Vietnam details of the Biden administration's discussions with Russia, which failed to stave off Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

Washington wants to show Hanoi that Russian President Vladimir Putin "did not want to pursue diplomacy," Sherman said in Ho Chi Minh City on Saturday.

The outreach comes after Vietnam, which a Biden administration official has called "the swing state" of the Indo-Pacific, abstained from a United Nations vote in March to condemn Russia's invasion and voted against a resolution in April that booted Moscow from the Human Rights Council.

"President Putin started this war. He could end it today," Sherman said in remarks at Fulbright University Vietnam.

"Vietnam will make its own sovereign decisions, and we respect those, but we will talk about it, we will give our views about it," she said. "We will share all of the diplomacy that went into trying to find a peaceful solution, one that President Putin ... would not take."

She added: "So we will share all of that, and then Vietnam will make its choices."

Vietnam has not taken sides in the conflict but Sherman pinned the blame squarely on one man.

"We agree with Vietnam that getting to peace is critical" and requires diplomacy, she said, seated at a blue table against a golden backdrop -- reminiscent of Ukraine's flag. "But we are also clear there is only one aggressor here, and that is President Putin, and one victim: Ukraine. And so they are not equivalents. They are not the same."

When asked by a student whether the U.S. is attempting to influence Vietnam on the Ukraine war, Sherman stopped short of telling Vietnam to condemn Russia, but replied that her country would present the facts.

Vietnam has strong historical ties to both Ukraine and Russia, but depends on the latter for most of its weapons imports. The communist country also relied on Soviet support during the Cold War.

Sherman acknowledged that history, as well as Hanoi's push to end the war in Ukraine through diplomacy. But such efforts have failed so far, she said.

Speaking of Washington's own efforts, she said: "I personally had bilateral meetings with Russia. We had a whole menu of things we could do to help deal with the security concerns that President Putin had," Sherman said

