
Russian MoD pondering re-launch of military bases in Cuba and Vietnam – Deputy Defense Minister

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Moscow is considering plans to return to Cuba and Vietnam where it had military bases in the past, Russia's Deputy Defense Minister Nikolay Pankov said on Friday, according to RIA news agency.

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"We are working on this," Pankov said, while declining to elaborate. The Russian Defense Ministry is re-assessing the decisions made in the past to shut down the bases in those countries, according to the defense official.

Previously the deputy head of the foreign affairs committee of the Russian parliament, Aleksey Chepa said that Russia "should re-assess the issue of our presence in other regions of the world. I believe that it would correspond with Russian interests to restore the bases in Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Africa that were closed," as quoted by TASS.

There were Soviet and Russian military bases in Cuba and Vietnam until 2002. The Russian navy was deployed in Cam Rahn, Vietnam, and Russia had a radio-electronic intelligence center in Lourdes, Cuba.

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While functioning, the Lourdes SIGINT facility was the largest of its kind operated by the USSR (and later Russia) outside of the country. The facility occupied 73 square kilometers and hosted some 1,500 employees at the peak of its activity.

The Soviet Union leased the Cam Rahn base rent-free from 1979 until 2004. In June 2001, the Vietnamese government announced that following the expiry of Russia's lease, Hanoi would "not sign an agreement with any country to use Cam Ranh Bay for military purposes."

However, at the end of 2014, a deal was signed between Russian and Vietnam, setting up standards of use of Russian warships in the port of Cam Ranh. According to the simplified procedure, Russian ships would only have to give prior notice to the Vietnamese authorities before entering Cam Ranh Bay, while other foreign navies would be limited to only one ship visit a year to Vietnamese ports.

Back in May, Vietnamese Ambassador to Russia Nguyen Thanh Sean told RIA Novosti that Vietnam isn't against the return of Russia to the military base in Cam Ranh Bay, but this cooperation shouldn't be directed against third countries.
