

What's in the New Vietnam-South Korea Defense Pact?

A recent agreement was just the latest move by both sides to strengthen their security ties.

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This week, South Korean Defense Minister Song Young-moo paid a visit to Vietnam. The trip once again spotlighted the growing security collaboration underway between Hanoi and Seoul as part of their wider strategic partnership, with consequences not just for bilateral ties but for the wider region as well.

Vietnam and South Korea security cooperation has generally factored into the broader relationship, which was elevated to the level of a strategic partnership back in 2009. But there have been notable advances since South Korean President Moon Jae-in's entry into office last year, which has seen a relatively greater focus on Southeast Asia under the New Southern Policy. Indeed, just in April, Vietnam Defense Minister Ngo Xuan Lich was in South Korea, which saw both sides conclude a joint vision statement for defense cooperation out to 2030, amid other developments in the defense realm of ties thus far.

This week, the relationship was in the headlines again as Song paid a planned return visit to Vietnam. During his visit, which lasted from June 3-5 following his attendance at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, Song and a high-ranking delegation from South Korea meet Vietnamese officials including Lich. The trip provided both sides with an opportunity to review the state of their security ties and also mull further steps boosting this aspect of their relationship.

During Song's visit, both sides reviewed their existing security cooperation, including the joint vision statement inked in April this year, and they also discussed other issues of regional and international concern, including the North Korea issue ahead of the expected summit between U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un in Singapore on June 14. According to Vietnam's defense ministry, following the meeting, both sides agreed to further boost defense cooperation in areas including defense industry, human resources training, and addressing post-war explosives and mining issues.

But the highlight of the trip was the signing of a new agreement between the two defense ministries. Both sides inked what Vietnam's defense ministry characterized as a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on logistics support for peacekeeping forces, natural disasters, and humanitarian relief.

Few additional details were publicly provided by either side about the specifics regarding the new pact. But it was yet another indicator of the growing security cooperation underway between the two countries of late. As South Korea continues to deepen its ties with Southeast Asian states like Vietnam and Hanoi looks to further strengthen its relations with a range of major and middle powers as part of its wider foreign policy approach, one can expect to see more developments on this front in the months that follow.



South Korean Defense Minister Song Young-moo, pictured here with U.S. Defense Secretary James Mattis.

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