

Vietnam-Israel Military Ties in the Spotlight with Bilateral Meeting

The growing defense relationship between the two sides was in the headlines again recently.

By Prashanth Parameswaran
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Last week, an Israeli defense delegation paid a visit to Vietnam as part of an ongoing effort to explore further opportunities in the defense realm. The interaction spotlighted the growing defense relationship between the two sides that often remains under the radar relative to some of Hanoi's other defense partnerships.

Though Vietnam and Israel established bilateral ties back in 1993, over the past few years, that has grown to include defense cooperation as well. A series of steps have been taken by both sides, at times quietly, with Israel opening a defense attaché office in Vietnam in 2014, the inking of a memorandum of understanding on defense cooperation in 2015, Vietnam's purchase of Israeli weapons systems, and both sides exploring other areas of cooperation such as technology transfer and defense industry through meetings, fora, symposia, and other interactions. Last year's visit by Israeli President Reuven Rivlin, just the second to Vietnam by an Israeli head of state, touched on defense issues as well.

2018 was expected to be an active year for bilateral ties, including the defense realm. Apart from the convergence of interests and continuity in ties, the fact that both countries were commemorating the 25th anniversary of their establishment of diplomatic ties and Israel was commemorating the 70th anniversary of the establishment of the state of Israel meant that we were likely to see some developments tied to these occasions. Indeed, the newly appointed Israeli ambassador to Vietnam has been highlighting the quest to boost bilateral ties this year, including in the defense realm.

As part of this context, the bilateral defense relationship was in the headlines again with an Israeli defense delegation in Vietnam last week. A delegation from the International Defense Cooperation Directorate of the Israeli defense ministry (SIBAT), led by Director Mishel Ben Baruch, was in Hanoi for meetings with Vietnamese personnel and officials.

According to Vietnam's defense ministry, the meeting provided the opportunity for both sides to evaluate the current state of cooperation in areas like education and training as well as defense industry, as well as to expand future collaboration.

Unsurprisingly, few specifics were released about exactly what the shape of that future bilateral defense collaboration would look like. The defense ministry said that in a reception held for the delegation, Vietnam's Deputy Defense Minister Nguyen Chin Vinh had expressed his appreciation for the results of Vietnam-Israel defense cooperation and expressed hope that the visit would further enhance the bilateral relationship.



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