

What's Next for Vietnam-Thailand Security Cooperation?

Thailand's minister of public security visited Vietnam, highlighting defense ties.

By Prashanth Parameswaran
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This week, Thailand's minister of public security paid a visit to Vietnam in yet another notable official exchange between the two Southeast Asian states. The interaction highlighted the ongoing activity on the defense side of the strategic partnership that both sides have forged over the years.

As I have noted before in these pages, the defense realm has long factored into wider cooperation between Vietnam and Thailand, which, though characterized by animosity for much of the Cold War, has been warming somewhat in recent years, with ties officially elevated to the level of a strategic partnership back in 2013. The security aspect of ties has covered a range of areas, from addressing challenges such as transnational crimes and illegal fishing to stepping up visits, training, and channels of communication.

One of the interactions both sides have been holding in recent years is the Vietnam-Thailand Joint Working Group (JWG) on politics and security. The JWG has provided an opportunity for both sides to discuss the full range of activities ongoing in that aspect of ties within the context of the wider strategic partnership, individual dialogues held between various ministries and institutions, channels of communication set up by agencies, and issues whether bilateral ones such as talks on mutual legal assistance or regional ones including the Mekong River and the South China Sea. The last iteration of the JWG, which was its ninth, was held in July last year.

This week, Vietnam-Thailand defense ties were in the spotlight again with the visit of the secretary-general of Thailand's National Security Council, General Wanlop Rugsanaoh, to Vietnam. Wanlop, along with his delegation from a series of Thai ministries and sectors, was in Vietnam for a series of meetings as well as for the convening of the 10th iteration of the Vietnam-Thailand Joint Working Group on politics and security from August 5 to August 8.

Vietnamese state media said that the discussions between Wanlop and his Vietnamese counterpart, Deputy Minister of Public Security Senior Lieutenant Bui Van Nam, touched on a range of political and security issues of importance to both sides – including nontraditional security challenges such as food security energy security, climate change, water security, and natural disasters – as well as wider regional and global issues such as the development of the ASEAN community and the threats from terrorism, racial and religious conflicts, and territorial and natural resource disputes, and the issues they posed for regime security.

They also discussed the role of the JWG itself in furthering cooperation between the two sides and the Ministry of Public Security and the NSC, including specific ways to improve its effectiveness as a key mechanism within the bilateral relationship moving forward.

Unsurprisingly, beyond that, few additional specifics were provided. But as visits and exchanges continue through the year and onto 2019 and 2020, when both countries will take turns to chair ASEAN, the security component of the Thailand-Vietnam relationship will continue to be an interesting area to watch.



Image Credit: [People's Army Newspaper](#)