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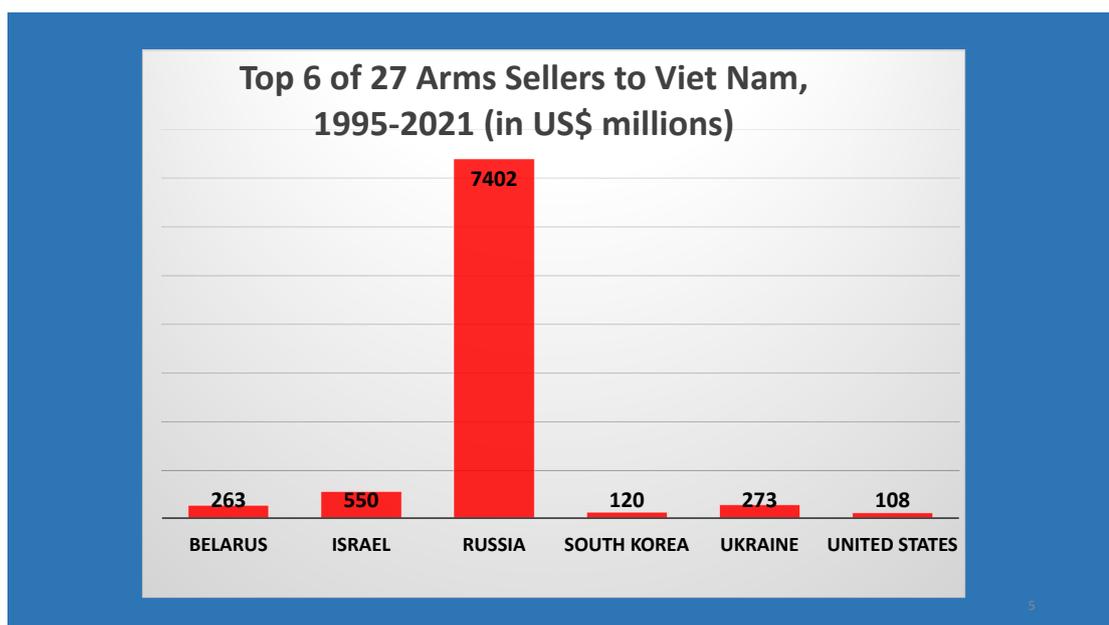


Background Brief:

Force Modernisation in Vietnam: Reply to Queries Received August 19, 2022

“Force Modernization in Vietnam: Building a Streamlined and Strong Army by 2025 and a Revolutionary, Regular, Highly Skilled and Modern People’s Army by 2030,” *Thayer Consultancy Background Brief*, August 8, 2022. The following queries were received after this brief was distributed:

- Slide 5: How much of the \$7.4 billion is direct imports and how much is it for licensed production (as you note in slide 8)? Or is the latter a separate line item?



RESPONSE: The data in Slide 5 is taken from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute’s (SIPRI) arms transfer data base and includes direct imports only. The SIPRI data is not official and likely understates the value of arms and weapons systems procured by Vietnam. Vietnam and Russia sometime engage in barter trade, for example.

The United Nations Register of Conventional Arms (UNROCA) includes general details on only seven categories of conventional weapons: battle tanks; armoured combat vehicles; large-calibre artillery systems; combat aircraft and unmanned combat aerial vehicles; attack helicopters; warships; and missiles and missile launchers.

Licensed production involves the transfer of technology. Vietnam's national defence industry has the capacity to manufacture anti-air and anti-ship missiles. It is likely there are instances where electronic components are provided by the supplier and are not captured in the SIPRI data because they fall below SIPRI's dollar threshold.

Vietnam has imported kits to assemble one KBO 2000/BPS 500 missile patrol boat between 2013-14, eight Tarantul-5 Fast Attack Craft imported between 2008-16, and coast guard vessels. These data are included in the SIPRI and UNROCA data bases.

- Slide 7: The U.S. has provided ScanEagles and a ground system, though not sure how public that is.

Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance

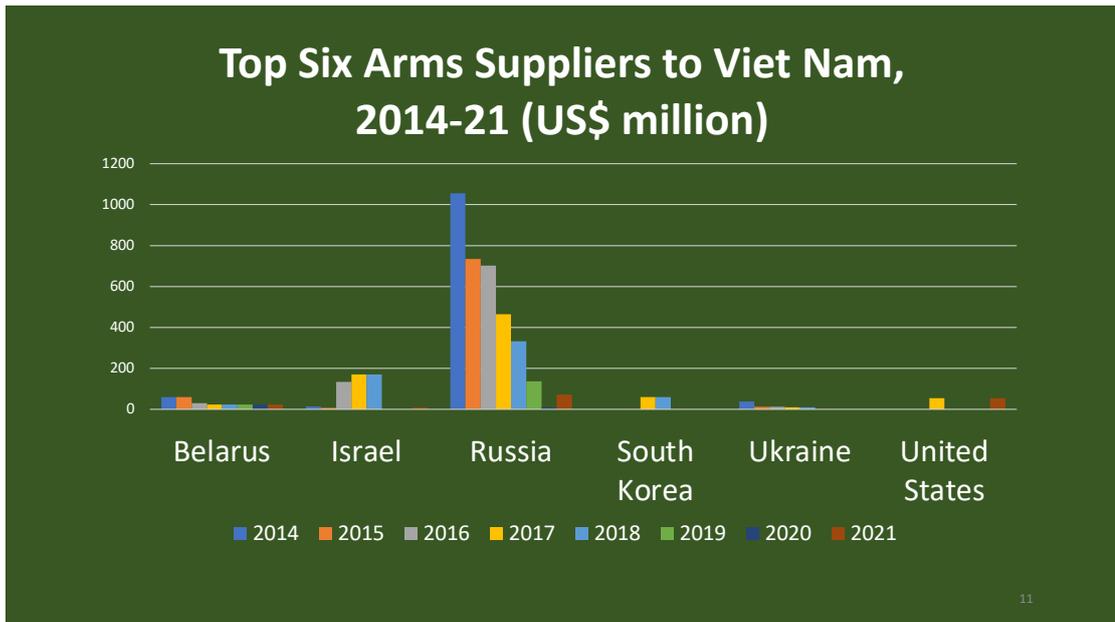
- Kolchuga passive early warning radar(Ukraine)
- Air search radar (France, Israel, Ukraine)
- Air defence SPYDER MR (Israel)
- Satellites: VNRED (France), satellite tracking (Israel), Earth observation (Japan)
- UAVs (Israel, Belarus and domestic) and UUV (Italy)
- AEW&C (Airbus DS C-295)

RESPONSE: The sale of the ScanEagle is in the public domain; they have been ordered but not yet received by Vietnam. See: Jon Grevatt, "LIMA 2019: Vietnam looks to procure Boeing's ScanEagle UAV," *Jane's*, March 27, 2019 and Gareth Jennings, "Vietnam to Receive ScanEagle unmanned aircraft," *Jane's*, June 3, 2019.

The order for six ScanEagle UAVs also was noted in the SIPRI data base. The ScanEagles were ordered in 2019 with the notation "'Maritime Security Initiative' aid; possibly for coast guard; delivery planned for 2022."

Also, see my "Vietnam to Stand Up UAV Reconnaissance Unit," *Thayer Consultancy Background Brief*, May 15, 2021. <https://www.scribd.com/document/508036818/Thayer-Vietnam-to-Stand-Up-UAV-Reconnaissance-Unit> that notes the ground station.

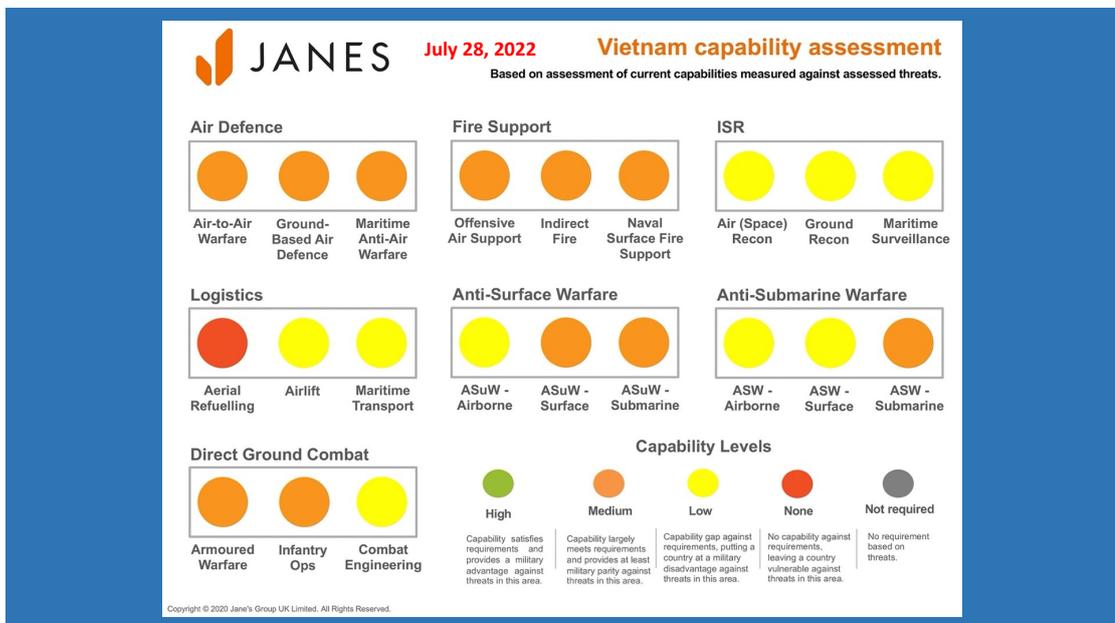
- Slide 11: The low level of Republic of Korea support is a head scratcher for me; I thought Seoul had cracked open the market.



RESPONSE: SIPRI’s data base only records Vietnam’s acquisition of two *Po Hang* corvettes from South Korea in 2016 and 2017 with delivery in 2017 and 2018, respectively. Both are second-hand and were delivered as part of an aid package with some armament removed prior to delivery.

There are no other recorded South Korean sales listed in the SIPRI data base. The SIPRI data base, however, contains extensive details of South Korean arms sales to Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Thailand.

- Slide 13: I think the Jane's capabilities assessment is very charitable, especially logistics and ASW. I'm not seeing it.



RESPONSE: I have worked with Jane’s for many years and I put my confidence in their experience to assess Vietnamese capabilities.

Note that Jane's capability levels are judged by their ability to meet requirements and provide military advantage/military parity/put the country at a disadvantage/leaving a country vulnerable "against threats to this area."

- Slide 15: The first two Kilo-class submarines are already at half their operational life, though Vietnam doesn't use them very much. We'll be interesting to see how they proceed.

Selective Force Modernization

- By 2025 the VPA will be compact and strong, by 2030 several services, corps and forces will have been modernised, and from 2030 the entire VPA will be modernised
 - Air-Defence Air Force Service
 - Navy
 - Coast Guard
 - Signal Force
 - Electronic Warfare Force
 - Technical Reconnaissance Force
 - Cyber Warfare Force
 - Cipher (cryptology) Force

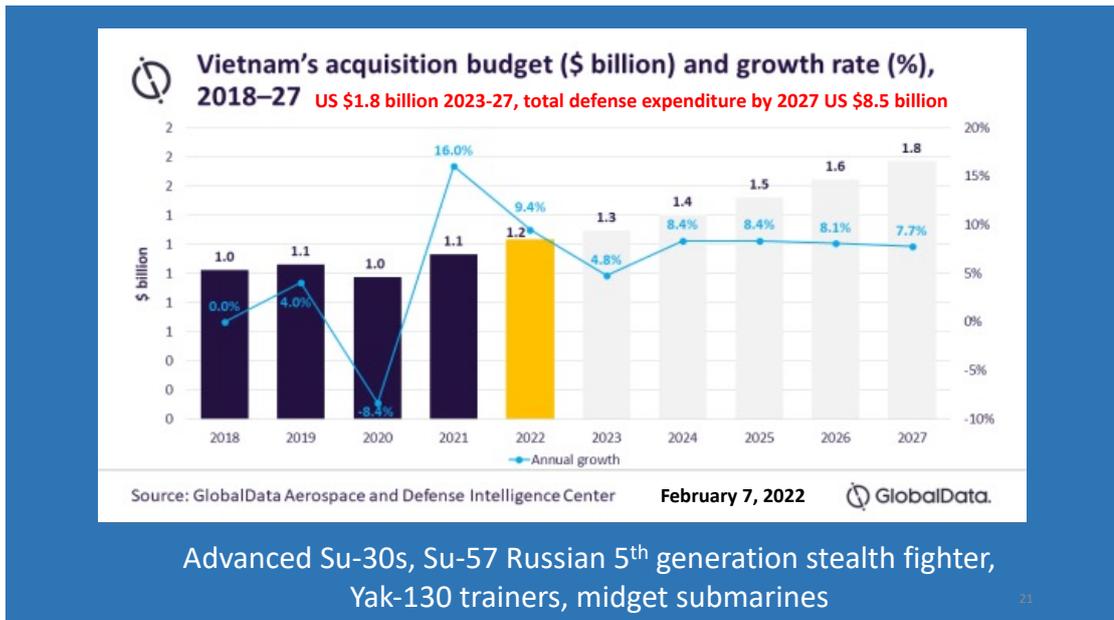
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RESPONSE: I gave a presentation in Ho Chi Minh City in June this year and noted with respect to the sharp decline in Vietnam's arms procurements after 2016, that one of the reasons was the huge and mounting maintenance costs of the *Varshavyanka* (Kilo) submarines and other "big ticket" arms procured from Russia.

See: "Vietnam's Security Environment in the New Era," Keynote Presentation to Emerging Vietnam 2022: A New Tiger Arises, Ho Chi Minh City Securities Corporation, Le Meridien Saigon Hotel, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, June 15-16, 2022. <https://www.scribd.com/document/578499837/Thayer-Vietnam-s-Security-Environment-in-the-New-Era>.

In my presentation I quoted Australian Admiral James Goldrick as noting with respect to Vietnam's purchase of six *Kilo*-class submarines that "the Vietnamese are trying to do something very quickly that no navy in recent times has managed successfully on such a scale from such a limited base."

- Slide 21: Interesting to see what they do with 5th generation fighters. Existing air assets are getting up there.



RESPONSE: There are three options here.

First, Vietnam could upgrade its Su-30s as an interim measure.

Second, Vietnam could opt for the Russian Su-57s.

Third, Vietnam has already contracted to acquire three U.S. T-6 trainers by 2023, along with spare parts and a maintenance package. Vietnam could opt to procure a package of twelve T-6s including simulators, maintenance and participation in an expanded aviation training program. This would provide the basis for Vietnam to acquire F-15E Strike Eagles.

- Slide 14: The big issue is really the development (or not) of doctrine to support Vietnam's force modernization.

2. The VPA's short-term and Long-term goals?

- “build a streamlined and strong Army by 2025, and a revolutionary, regular, advanced and modern People's Army by 2030”
 - Resolution of the 13th National Congress of the Vietnam Communist Party, February 2021
- Three Breakthroughs
 - organisational structure; training; and military standards, discipline and administrative reform
- Proactively prevent the risk of war and conflict from afar

RESPONSE: Vietnam's current priority on force modernisation involves a top to bottom restructuring of its armed forces – cutting administration staff by ten percent;

disbanding and merging units and transferring equipment, property and weapons to other units; and creating new units. Vietnam has already adopted a number of general strategies:

- Chiến lược Quốc phòng Việt Nam (Vietnam National Defence Strategy)
- Chiến lược Quân sự (Military Strategy)
- Chiến lược Bảo vệ Tổ quốc trên không gian mạng (Strategy for Protecting the Homeland in Cyberspace)
- Chiến lược Bảo vệ biên giới quốc gia (National Border Protection Strategy)

It is clear that Vietnam will review and revise its current service doctrines to meet the challenges in the “new situation” during the current force modernization process. No doubt they will draw on lessons learned from the war in Ukraine and the efficacy of Russian military equipment and weapons.

Although priority will be given to selective services, forces and units, the entire process of force modernisation will not be complete until 2030 and after.

Suggested citation: Carlyle A. Thayer, “Force Modernisation in Vietnam: Reply to Queries Received,” *Thayer Consultancy Background Brief*, August 19, 2022. All background briefs are posted on Scribd.com (search for Thayer). To remove yourself from the mailing list type, UNSUBSCRIBE in the Subject heading and hit the Reply key.

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