

Defense Cooperation in Vietnam



Former military relations were established in 1996 between the United States and Vietnam. Shortly after, the U.S. Embassy established a Defense Attaché Office. The DAO has led the way in forging an increasingly robust bilateral relationship between the United States and Vietnam based on friendship, mutual respect, candor, and shared commitments to ensure a peaceful, stable, and secure Asia-Pacific region. Over the past decade, our two militaries have focused on developing cooperative relations for peacekeeping operations and training, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, maritime security, military medicine, military science and technology, and exchanges of high-level visits, as well as ways to increase understanding between the two militaries.

1995-2000: Initial Contacts

- Formal military-military relations initiated in November 1996.
- USPACOM TITLE 10 multilateral conferences and seminars; senior level military visits; bilateral cooperation on search and rescue, military medicine, environmental security and demining, and POW/MIA.
- The Vietnamese focus on military medicine, military scientific & technological cooperation, disaster relief and humanitarian projects guided relations from 1997 to 2001
- Notable key visit in March 1997 from the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asian and Pacific Affairs, USPACOM Commander and First DAO.
- First Air War College group visit to Vietnam; U.S. Military engineers demining training program starts in Vietnam; Vietnam sends first officers to the Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies (APCSS).

2000-2005: Expand Scope and Pace of Defense Engagement

- President Clinton's visit in November 2000 sustains the momentum on demining cooperation, legitimizing high-level discussions and managing wartime legacy issues.
- From 2002 to 2003, the bilateral relationship expands to Bilateral Defense Dialogue and Policy Level Discussion.
- In 2003, the USS Vandegrift made the first port call to Vietnam, just one week after Vietnamese Defense Minister Pham Van Tra visited the Pentagon.
- After the implementation of PEPFAR in 2003, DoD increased cooperation with Vietnam's Military Medical Department to expand capacity for HIV diagnostic, laboratory, training and blood safety at military medical facilities. Since 2005, the average annual budget for these programs has been about two million USD.
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2005-2008: Incorporating New Activities into Existing Plans

- Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld met Prime Minister Phan Van Khai.
- Hanoi signed an end user agreement for International Military Education and Training (IMET) and foreign military sales.
- Vietnam hosted the Asia Pacific Military Medical Conference (APMMC) in Hanoi;
- In July 2005, the USG established an IMET agreement with Vietnam for expanded practical bilateral cooperation, including meteorological and hydrographic studies and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) capacity building.
- The International Traffic in Arms Regulations enabled some constrained arms sales;
- Secretary Rumsfeld visited Hanoi in mid 2006.
- In December 2006, President George Bush signed a finding to authorize the United States government and U.S. private companies to provide limited defense articles to Vietnam;
- In June 2008, Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung visited the Pentagon.
- Defense Ministry focused on building HADR and peace keeping capabilities.

2008-2010: Bilateral Defense Relationship Focus on Building capabilities and new Skills in Specialized areas: Peacekeeping, Environmental Security, Multilateral Search and Rescue Coordination, and Regional Disaster Response

- Political-Military dialogue between State Department and Foreign Ministry.
- Senior Vietnamese military officials flew out to the USS Stennis in April 2009 to mark the first-ever tour of a U.S. nuclear-powered aircraft carrier.
- The USS Heezen visited Vietnam in 2009 to conduct searches for MIA wrecks- the first time a U.S. Navy ship has been permitted to do so.
- The U.S. Army Pacific conducted a Medical Readiness Exercise and Combat Lifesaver training in Vietnam in July 2009. The event is planned again for August 2010.
- The U.S. Pacific Air Force and Vietnam provided medical, dental and engineering assistance to the Vietnamese people through Operation Pacific Angel in September 2009, and again in May 2010.
- Vietnam's Minister of Defense visited the U.S. in December 2009 and had key meetings with senior U.S. foreign policy and defense officials.

2010 and Beyond: The Way Forward

As our bilateral relations grow to new levels, we continue to encourage Vietnam to participate more actively in peacekeeping through the Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI) program. We strive to continue to assist Vietnam to strengthen capabilities in Search and Rescue, Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief, Military Medicine, and Maritime Security. We plan to continue to work with the Ministry of Defense to provide more opportunities for Vietnamese military officials to attend professional education courses at U.S. military Staff Colleges and military academies. We also plan to send a number of high level delegations and a sizeable ship visit to Vietnam to celebrate the 15th Anniversary of U.S.-Vietnam relationship.