

Vietnam Trains Cambodian Navy Amid Chinese Competition

By Jacob Zenn
OE Watch Commentary

Vietnam's Naval Academy has trained Cambodian naval officers for years. Recently, the Vietnamese government-affiliated *People's Army Newspaper* reported that the Cambodian navy sent senior officials to Vietnam to discuss how to improve the effectiveness of the program from which thousands of Cambodians have graduated. The article notes the Cambodian cadets receive instruction in history, tradition and naval tasks and functions, while fostering friendship and solidarity between the two neighboring countries' navies. The continuation of the training program comes amid greater competition from China for influence on the Cambodian navy.

A separate article posted on the Chinese Ministry of Defense website noted that U.S. media outlets and government officials have claimed that China's development of the Cambodian Ream Naval Base in Sihanoukville lacked transparency and was part of the Chinese military strategy to create a global network of naval bases. The Chinese Ministry of Defense, however, claims its naval cooperation with Cambodia

is a normal function of international relations and consistent with international law. The ministry also condemned any suggestion that Chinese naval activities in Cambodia pose a threat. Rather, the Chinese claim that Ream Naval Base will improve Cambodia's ability to protect its maritime territorial integrity and combat piracy and other maritime crimes.

Vietnam is an historical ally of Cambodia and competitor of China with maritime territorial disputes with China over islands in the South China Sea. Therefore, Chinese presence at the Ream Naval Base, near Vietnam's own naval base in Phú Quốc, draws Vietnam's attention. Given Vietnamese perception of naval competition with China, continuing to train Cambodian naval cadets is important to Vietnam as it seeks to maintain military influence in Cambodia.

The cooperation program in education and training between Cambodian military schools and the [Vietnamese] Naval Academy will continue to expand and develop to improve its effectiveness...



Vietnam People's Navy honor guard at ASEAN defense ministers meeting 2010-10-12

Source: Master Sgt. Jerry Morrison, U.S. Air Force, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vietnam_People%27s_Navy_honor_guard_at_ASEAN_defense_ministers_meeting_2010-10-12_1.jpg Attribution: CC x 2.0

Continued: Vietnam Trains Cambodian Navy Amid Chinese Competition

Source: “Đoàn cán bộ cấp cao Hải quân Hoàng gia Campuchia trao đổi kinh nghiệm tại Học viện Hải quân (A senior official delegation from the Royal Cambodian Navy exchanged experiences at the Naval Academy),” *People’s Army Newspaper* (government-affiliated media source), 27 June 2022. <https://www.qdnd.vn/quoc-phong-an-ninh/tin-tuc/doan-can-bo-cap-cao-hai-quan-hoang-gia-campuchia-trao-doi-kinh-nghiem-tai-hoc-vien-hai-quan-698277>

On June 27, a high-ranking delegation of the Royal Cambodian Navy led by Vice Admiral Non Sophat visited and exchanged experiences at the Naval Academy. Dr. Nguyen Van Lam, Director of the Naval Academy, introduced briefly the history, traditions, functions, tasks, achievements and development trajectory of the Naval Academy. Simultaneously, he discussed with the delegation the situation and results of training Cambodian military cadets at the academy. Over the years, the Naval Academy has trained and cultivated thousands of Royal Cambodian Navy officers. Recently, despite the complicated situation of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Academy still organizes trainings for Cambodian students.

The cooperation program in education and training between Cambodian military schools and the Naval Academy will continue to expand and develop to improve its effectiveness further and contribute to fostering more friendship and solidarity between the armies, navies, and peoples of Vietnam and Cambodia to ensure peace, stability, and development of each country in the region and in the world.

Source: “国防部回应美炒作中柬合作：戴着有色眼镜看什么都“不透明 (The Ministry of Defense responded to the United States exaggeration about China-Cambodia cooperation: Like wearing colored glasses to makes everything "blurry"),” *mod.gov.cn* (Chinese Ministry of Defence website), 22 June 2022. http://www.mod.gov.cn/jzhzt/2022-06/30/content_4914396.htm

Some media continue to exaggerate the normal exchanges and cooperation between China and Cambodia, which is entirely devoid of ulterior motives. On June 8, the upgrading and reconstruction project of the Yunyang Naval Base assisted by China officially commenced. It conforms to the domestic laws of the two countries and relevant international laws and international practices and is not targeted at a third party. The construction of the Yunyang base is aimed at strengthening the Cambodian Navy’s ability to maintain maritime territorial integrity and combat maritime crimes.

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