



The Growth of Russia-Thailand Relations: What's Next?

OE Watch Commentary: Russia has set its eyes on Thailand and is clearly striving to gain more influence in the region. According to the excerpted article from *The Nation*, Russia is pursuing a strategy to boost trade and other ties with Southeast Asian nations, particularly Thailand. Some of the areas in which both countries are hoping to strengthen ties include transport, logistics, energy, biotech, robotics, information technology, cyber security, terrorism, and military. The article cites Russian Deputy Minister of Economic Development, Alexei Gruzdev, as calling Thailand a possible “hub in ASEAN” and “a key trading bloc and an important member of the international community.” Additionally, Gruzdev expressed a willingness to “take part in infrastructure development (within Thailand), including for a high-speed railway, port development, and air traffic control system for U-Tapao airport.” The excerpted article published in the *Bangkok Post* discusses recent commitments to cooperate in combatting international terrorism and transnational crimes and there are clear indications that Russia could be preparing to play a bigger role in the region. For example, Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha expressed hopes Russia will participate in meetings and dialogues initiated by Thailand, once Bangkok assumes the ASEAN chairmanship next year.

According to the excerpted articles from *The Diplomat* and *RIA Novosti*, Russia and Thailand have been cooperating in the military and defense industries as well. In May 2016, Prayut visited Russia in what was said to be the first formal visit by a Thai premier in more than a decade. During the visit, both sides signed an agreement on military cooperation. Following the visit, reports emerged claiming Thailand planned on buying Russian helicopters and tanks and a “jointly run production and maintenance facility in Thailand (was planned) to support the Mi-17V5 helicopters and other Russian systems in Thailand.” The article from *RIA Novosti* mentions Russia-Thai cooperation in security and that the two sides are developing military ties to strengthen regional security and stability in the Asia-Pacific region.

Overall, Russia offers Thailand an alternative to China and the United States for support, while for Russia, firming up relations with Thailand is a strategic move to increased trade and influence in the ASEAN region. Thailand also is strategically located by the entrance to the heavily traveled Strait of Malacca. Additionally, there has been ongoing talk of trying to build the Kra Isthmus canal, which would cut through Thailand, and be a huge benefit to Russian trade. Finally, Russia’s growing presence in Southeast Asia could counterbalance that of the United States and China. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

Source: Wang Weidong, Asina Pornwasin, “Thailand Moves up in Russia’s Sights,” *The Nation*, 22 February 2018. <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/detail/Economy/30339403>

Russia sees Thailand as a key focus for the country in Asia as part of its strategy to boost trade and other ties with Southeast nations, said Alexei Gruzdev, Deputy Minister of Economic Development.

“... Thailand may be considered a hub in Asean. There are a lot of fields to explore and that’s why we were here,” said Gruzdev, who led a trade mission to Thailand.

In regards to the country’s Eastern Economic Corridor, Gruzdev said that Russia was ready to take part in infrastructure development, including for a high speed railway, port development and air traffic control system for U-Tapao airport.

“All these fields that mention transport, logistic, energy, biotech, pharmaceutical, medical equipment, financing, robotic, IT, and Internet technology, we are interested in.

“We think that we need to explore new areas like in petrochemicals, pharmaceuticals, medical equipment, robotics, IT and cyber security. Russia is a s leading country in term of cybersecurity, technology and software,” Gruzdev said.

Gruzdev said that Asean is a key trading bloc and an important member of the international community.

Source: Wassana Nanuam, “Thailand, Russia Unite to Fight Terror,” *Bangkok Post*, 1 March 2018. <https://www.bangkokpost.com/news/security/1420067/thailand-russia-unite-to-fight-terror>

Thailand and Russia confirmed yesterday a joint commitment to strengthen security cooperation in combatting international terrorism and transnational crimes, and enhancing cyber security.

Source: Prashanth Parameswaran, “What’s Next for Russia-Thailand Military Ties?” *The Diplomat*, 20 January 2017. <https://thediplomat.com/2017/01/whats-next-for-russia-thailand-military-ties>

But cooperation between Moscow and Bangkok has been on the uptick in recent years. Thailand has been looking to boost relations with several other nations following a coup in May 2014, which complicated its ties with the United States and other Western nations. Meanwhile, Russia under Vladimir Putin – ambitious abroad and increasingly isolated from the West – has been looking to boost its presence in the Asia-Pacific, including in Southeast Asia.

In a key step towards boosting ties, in May 2016, Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha made a trip to Russia in May 2016, the first formal visit by a Thai premier in more than a decade. Though Prayut had downplayed the defense component of the relationship, his visit last year came amid reports that Thailand planned on buying Russian helicopters and tanks, and an agreement on military cooperation was one of six pacts inked by the two sides during his trip

Interestingly, one of the topics discussed was the setting up of a jointly run production and maintenance facility in Thailand. The facility, according to unnamed sources who spoke to IHS Jane’s, would reportedly support the Mi-17V5 helicopters and other Russian systems in Thailand but also potentially look to provide maintenance support to other Mi-17V5 operators in Southeast Asia.

(continued)



Continued: The Growth of Russia-Thailand Relations: What's Next?

“Russia sees Thailand as a key focus for the country in Asia as part of its strategy to boost trade and other ties with Southeast nations...”

Source: Yevgeny Belenky, “Военное сотрудничество РФ и Таиланда становится фактором стабильности в АТР (Military Cooperation between Russia and Thailand is becoming a Factor in the Stability of the Asia-Pacific Region),” *RIA Novosti*, 20 March 2017. https://ria.ru/defense_safety/20170320/1490368903.html

Russia-Thai cooperation in security, developing military ties, military-technical cooperation is an important element in bilateral relations and factors in to strengthening regional security and stability in the Asia-Pacific region.

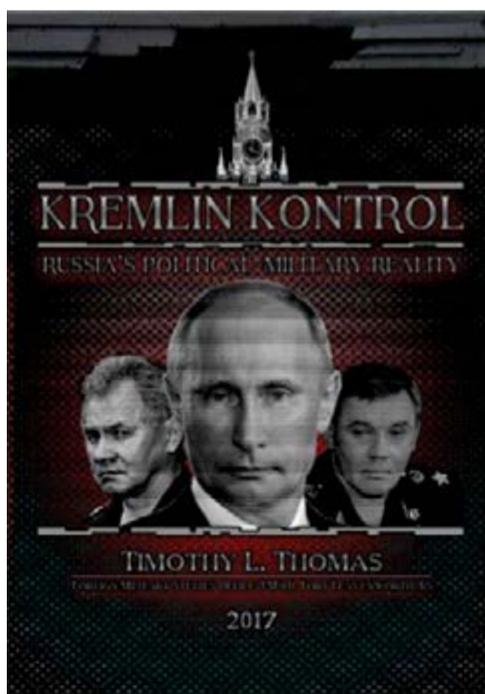
In 2016, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense of Thailand, General Prawit Wongsuwan, visited Russia twice. In 2015 and 2016, detachments of military ships from the Russian Navy's Pacific Fleet, visited Thailand, the ambassador recalled.

... it was a question of exporting and importing modern weapons and military equipment, cooperation in locating production, assembling Russian weapons in Thailand, serving Russian military equipment – primarily aviation – having dual use-military and civilian purposes.



Russian President Vladimir Putin Meeting with Prime Minister of Thailand Prayut Chan-o-cha.

Source: Russian Presidency, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/51941>, CC4.0.



KREMLIN KONTROL by TIMOTHY L. THOMAS

In 2016 Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov instituted sweeping changes that have reorganized the country's security forces and reestablished the nation's military prowess. This study, *Kremlin Kontrol*, aims to describe how control over the security services and the military have hastened those changes.

<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-books/197266/download>