

ASEAN Defense Chiefs Agree to New Cybersecurity Group

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Last week, the defense chiefs of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) finally adopted a proposal by the Philippines to establish a cyber security working group within the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus).

The ADMM-Plus – which groups the ten Southeast Asian countries along with the United States, China, Australia, India, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand and Russia – is often referred to as the emerging premier venue for defense and security issued in the region. Held biennially, it is a newer, expanded version of the ADMM which has been held among the ten ASEAN countries themselves annually since 2006.

On May 25, at the 10th ADMM meeting held in the Lao capital of Vientiane, the ASEAN defense chiefs decided to adopt a concept paper proposed by the Philippines to establish a cyber security working group within the ADMM-Plus. The proposal was initially floated by outgoing Philippine Defense Secretary Voltaire Gazmin during the ADMM Retreat in Kuala Lumpur last November and was also discussed during the ASEAN Defense Senior Officials Meeting (ADSOM) Working Group (WG) meeting held in the former Lao royal capital of Luang Prabang in February.

The working group would provide a formal platform for countries to both exchange expertise and knowledge as well to promote practical cooperation in the area of cyber security. Its addition is also a clear signal that ASEAN is increasingly paying greater attention to cyber security as a key defense issue.

The ADMM-Plus currently has the six ADMM-Plus Experts' Working Groups (EWGs), the divisions under which cooperation is structured through field training exercises, meetings, workshops and seminars. These are: humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR); maritime security; military medicine; counterterrorism; peacekeeping operations; and humanitarian mine action.

The Philippines will co-chair the new working group on cyber security with New Zealand from 2017 to 2020. Manila is also chairing ASEAN next year under the leadership of its new president Rodrigo Duterte, who won the Philippine election earlier this month to succeed Benigno Aquino III (See: "[The Philippines Under Duterte: Reassurance Needed at Home and Abroad](#)").