



Thailand Acquires Chinese Submarines

OE Watch Commentary: On 11 September the excerpted article under military news for the Chinese language website *sina.com* discussed a new deal between China and Thailand for China to manufacture a S26T submarine. It will be built by the China Shipbuilding Industry Corporation (CSIC) in Wuhan and is expected to be delivered by 2023. The article noted that although Thailand has traditionally been “a traditional ally of the United States,” this deal is another example of growing ties between China and Thailand that have accelerated since 2014.

The article contextualized Thailand’s purchase in terms of geopolitics. It notes, for example, that Vietnam has acquired Kilo-class submarines from Russia and that Singapore and Malaysia also have submarines. The article considers Vietnam to be a rival of Thailand and suggested that the Vietnamese view China as assisting Thailand to build its “second South China Sea fleet” that can undermine Vietnamese regional interests. The only small submarines that Thailand had acquired prior to the deal with China were part of World War II compensation from Japan, but they have since been retired.

The article acknowledges how Thailand’s new government in 2014 first considered purchasing submarines from Germany, but only after that did not work out did the government consider purchasing them from China. Indeed, what made China’s bid attractive to Thailand is that the price is more reasonable than submarines from other countries, while the quality of Chinese submarines is also improving.

The article also recognizes that this deal cannot be divorced from other trends. With Thailand as a new client, and Pakistan as a long-time client of China when it comes to submarines, China is becoming one of the major exporters of submarines in the region. However, the article indicates that the export to Pakistan of the S20P submarine has been delayed, or even called off, according to Western media. Nevertheless, the article indicates such reports are only the product of speculation and encourages readers to continue to pay close attention to the deal with Pakistan. Indeed, according to the article, that deal would warrant as much excitement as the current deal with Thailand. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“Although Thailand has always been a traditional ally of the United States, it has been strengthening cooperation with China in all areas since 2014.”



“Naval Ensign of Thailand flown at RTNHQ.”

Source: Xiangyod, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Naval_Ensign_of_Thailand_flown_at_RTNHQ.jpg, CC-BY-3.0.

Source: “中国出口泰国S26T潜艇开工 (China’s export of the S26T submarine to Thailand has begun),” *sina.com.cn*, 11 September 2018. <http://mil.news.sina.com.cn/jssd/2018-09-11/doc-ihicyfw8568153.shtml>

On September 4, a Chinese S26T submarine that was sold to Thailand was officially celebrated in Wuhan. The Thai Navy Commander went to the scene to launch the project and give a speech. Although Thailand has always been a traditional ally of the United States, it has been strengthening cooperation with China in all areas since 2014. Vietnamese media has since claimed that China is helping Thailand to build a “Second South China Sea Fleet.”

In 2014, the Thai military government came into office and finally launched an international bid. In July 2016, the Thai Defense Minister announced that he would purchase three submarines. On May 5, 2017, [China] officially signed the agreement.

In 2017, the chief designer of China’s conventional submarine said in an interview that China’s latest conventional submarine has surpassed the Russian “kilo-class” submarine, and its tactical indicators rank among the best in the world.

It makes sense that now that the work on the S26T for Thailand has started, there is no reason why the S20P for Pakistan should not start. Is there a problem? Previously, Western media claimed that the deal between China and Pakistan was called off. However, this should be considered speculation.

If the work starts on the S20P for Pakistan, it will require a grand opening ceremony like when the work on the S26T for Thailand started.... One can only wait for more news!