



Motive for Thailand's Submarine Program?

OE Watch Commentary: Thailand has not possessed any submarines since the early 1950s. While officials have expressed an interest in acquiring submarines on many occasions since then, the desire to have them has been most heavily voiced since 2014. According to the accompanying article from the *Nikkei Asian Review*, Thailand opened a \$17.3 million submarine headquarters and training center in Sattahip, a naval base in the Gulf of Thailand, after the military Junta took control of the country in July of that year. The country also approved a bill in January 2017 to buy the first of three Chinese Yuan-class S26T submarines, a modified version of the Chinese Yuan-class submarine. As part of the contract, China agreed to provide free CM-208 missiles, which can be fired at any surface (land or sea) target within 290 kilometers.

According to the accompanying article from the *Bangkok Post*, both sides signed a contract in May 2017 for Thailand to purchase three of these submarines. The first submarine is expected to be delivered in about six years. To accommodate them, the Thai navy had reportedly planned to build docking facilities in the Gulf of Thailand and the Andaman Sea. Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha had expressed his interest in purchasing submarines on at least one occasion. According to the *Nikkei Asian Review*, during a 2016 press conference, he had said that Thailand would buy submarines, “not for battle, but so that others will be in awe of us.” In addition, as both articles point out, neighboring countries (Malaysia, Singapore, and Vietnam), already possess submarines.

Today, Thailand appears to be changing course. According to the other article from the *Bangkok Post* (dated 18 July 2018), Thailand is now seeking to develop and construct its own indigenous fleet of “midget” submarines. These are expected to have a surface displacement of between 150 to 300 tons and a crew of 10. The project is expected to take about four years to design and another two years to construct and will cost well over \$30 million. Thailand is reportedly sending approximately 25 navy officers, all graduates in naval architecture and other fields from schools in Europe, to England for training. While Prayuth claims to be trying to maintain pace with his neighbors, Thailand could be designing midget submarines because of their better suitability for navigating the shallow waters in the Gulf of Thailand. Midget submarines are also stealthier and have fewer manning requirements. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

“Thailand will buy submarines ‘not for battle, but so that others will be in awe of us...’ Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha.”

Source: Marwaan Macan-Markar, “Thailand and China: Brothers in Arms,” *Nikkei Asian Review*, 2 February 2017. <https://asia.nikkei.com/magazine/20170202/Politics-Economy/Thailand-and-China-Brothers-in-arms>

Thailand will buy submarines “not for battle, but so that others will be in awe of us,” Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha, the nation’s former military chief and current head of its ruling junta, said at a 2016 press conference. Prayuth’s regime took a decisive step toward that muscular view in January after the National Legislative Assembly, the country’s rubber-stamp parliament, approved a bill to spend 13.5 billion baht (\$383 million) to buy a Chinese submarine -- the first of an expected three-boat, \$1 billion deal.

The Yuan-class S26T submarine will be delivered in about six years to the Thai navy’s submarine squadron, which trained in Germany and South Korea but had no vessel to operate. That became glaringly obvious in July 2014, two months after the military seized power, when a \$17.3 million submarine headquarters and training center was opened in Sattahip, a naval base on the Gulf of Thailand.

The new submarine order brings Thailand on a par with neighbors Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam, which have all acquired submarines...

Source: Wassana Nanuam, “Chinese Submarine Deal Signed,” *Bangkok Post*, 5 May 2017. <https://www.bangkokpost.com/news/security/1244259/chinese-submarine-deal-signed>

The navy has plans to buy three of the Yuan Class S26T submarines eventually from China at a total cost of 36 billion baht spread over 11 years. The “T” designates the version being sold exclusively to Thailand.

Opponents of the procurement earlier criticized the cabinet’s quiet approval of the deal on April 18. They also doubt whether the navy really needs a submarine, citing the shallowness of the Gulf of Thailand.

However, defense authorities insist submarines are necessary because neighboring countries already have them. They also argue that the medium-sized submarine will be able to navigate through the Gulf.

Under the contract, China will also provide free CM-708 missiles which can be fired from the submarine at targets on the water’s surface or on land over a range of 290 kilometres. The sub also comes with other weapons including torpedoes and a two-year warranty.

The navy has announced plans to build docking facilities for submarines both in the Gulf of Thailand and the Andaman Sea.

Source: Wassana Nanuam, “PM Approves ‘Midget’ Subs for Navy,” *Bangkok Post*, 18 July 2018. <https://www.bangkokpost.com/news/security/1505206/pm-approves-midget-subs-for-navy>

Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha has approved a 193-million baht project to design a so-called “midget” submarine -- the first step in the planned construction of a prototype for the Royal Thai Navy.

The design will take four years and construction of the first mini-submarine another two, to be followed by seaworthiness checks and training for one year, Capt Sattaya said.

Some 25 navy officers, all graduates in naval architecture and other fields from schools in Europe, were sent for training in England.

The first mini-submarine in the unofficially named “Chalawan Class” would have a surface displacement of 150-300 tonnes, a crew of 10 and a 300-nautical-mile range, he said.