



What's in Vietnam's New Submarine Vessel?

Hanoi's construction of a submarine rescue vessel deserves attention.

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Late last month, Vietnam held a keel-laying ceremony for the construction of a submarine rescue vessel. The move represents just the latest step Hanoi is taking to build up its capabilities in this space, which it views as being useful to advance a wide range of interests in the maritime domain.

As I have been noting in these pages, Vietnam, among other Asian states, has been investing heavily in building up the subsurface capabilities of the Vietnam People's Navy over the years. The headlines tend to focus on Vietnam's new submarines from Russia; last year, Vietnam had commissioned the last two of six *Kilo*-class diesel electric submarines ordered from Russia in a deal initially inked back in 2009 (See: "[Russia-Vietnam Military Ties in the Spotlight](#)").

But Vietnam has also been eyeing other capabilities and forms of cooperation as well. The Vietnamese government has been learning as well as exploring collaboration on submarine rescue in concert with other regional states. It has also been looking at how to invest in its own vessels for purposes including not just rescue operations, but various forms of surveying and research that might be useful for a range of reasons, including further shoring up its claims in the South China Sea (See: "[Why Vietnam's New Coast Guard Law Matters](#)").

On May 24, Vietnam held a keel-laying ceremony for its first submarine rescue vessel in the northern city of Haiphong. The vessel, designated a multipurpose submarine search and rescue ship (MSSARS), has been given the name MSSARS 9316, and its construction is being undertaken by Z189, a shipyard company under the defense ministry that has experience working with several other countries previously.

According to Vietnamese state media, the ship measures 93 meters long, 16 meters wide, and 5.85 meters high, and will have a displacement of 4,000 tons. It has several features, including an on-deck helipad and a positioning system to make sure it can function amid harsh weather conditions.

It will likely be a while before the vessel is actually unveiled for use and we are able to assess how Vietnam will utilize it. State media reports indicate that the entire shipbuilding process has been estimated at 27 months, and in remarks at the ceremony, Pham Hoai Nam, the rear admiral of the Vietnam People's Navy, reinforced the need to keep to the schedule and to hasten the implementation process without delay.

But thus far, based on Vietnamese state media reports and consistent with previous government articulations of how the country thinks about investments in such capabilities, the role of MSSARS 9316 has been widely conceived to include not just international submarine rescue operations, but also underwater surveying, seafloor mapping, and ocean research.



Image of a Kilo-class submarine.

Image Credit: [Wikimedia Commons](#)