

Russia Sending New Stealth Submarines to Crimea

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The Novorossiisk's sister ship, the Stary Oskol at the Admiralty Shipyards in St. Petersburg

As part of its military buildup in recently-annexed Crimea, the Russian military is deploying the first of six new ultra-quiet Kilo-class submarines to the Black Sea Fleet, a spokesperson for the armed forces said Wednesday.

Earlier on Wednesday, Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu called the buildup of Russian forces in Crimea a top priority for the military, as "the situation in Ukraine has escalated sharply and the presence of foreign military has increased in the immediate vicinity of our borders," news agency TASS reported.

Russia seized Crimea from Ukraine in March, prompting an international crisis that has been deepened by bloodletting in eastern Ukraine, where the West accuses Moscow of supporting pro-Russian separatist militias.

The new stealth submarine, named the Novorossiisk, is still in St. Petersburg, awaiting transfer to the Northern Fleet for its final sea trials and cruise-missile tests, a spokesperson for the Southern Military District told RIA Novosti Wednesday. After completion of these final tests, the boat will be deployed in Sevastopol — home of the Black Sea Fleet.

An update to the classic Kilo-class diesel-electric submarine design, the Novorossiisk is quieter than most of the nuclear powered submarines that Russia operates, such as the new Yasen-class attack submarines that are being built for the Northern Fleet. While the Yasens are designed for long-range deployments in the deep oceans, diesel-electric submarines like the Kilos are suited for operations close to home in shallow waters.

The Black Sea Fleet will receive 6 brand-new Kilo-class submarines by 2016. The second boat under construction, the Rostov-on-Don, was launched in July, while the third and fourth vessels — the Stary Oskol and Krasnodar — are still under construction. Two more boats will be laid down for construction within the next two years.

Russia has built a great many Kilos over the years, as they are a popular export item for the defense industry. Since their introduction in the 1980s, Russia has exported 19 of the submarines to China, Iran and India, according to the Nuclear Threat Initiative, a nonprofit organization that tracks the proliferation behaviors of major world powers.

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