



PAKISTAN'S *JUGAAD* AT BUILDING SEA-BASED DETERRENCE



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As the world remained fixated on the developments unfolding in the Korean peninsula in the first quarter of this year, the second testing of a nuclear capable, submarine launched cruise missile (SLCM) from a submerged platform by Pakistan received little attention. Called Babur 3, this has been described as a variant of the Babur cruise missiles that Pakistan has been developing with varied ranges and which can be launched from different platforms. Babur-3 has been attributed a range of 450 kms. According to Pakistani plans, this missile is to be deployed on the Agosta 90-B diesel electric submarines in order to grant the country a sort of sea-based second strike capability in order to enhance the country's nuclear deterrence.

A desire for sea-based deterrence is not unnatural for any nuclear weapons possessor. Such a capability is meant to signal to the adversary that even in the remote eventuality of it being able to carry out a 'disarming' first strike, retaliation would still be assured from the platforms hidden in the vast seas somewhere. Indeed, from the time of the Cold War this conventional wisdom has persisted. In fact, some countries like the United Kingdom have opted to retain only the sea-based leg of their nuclear arsenal in the form of 3-4 nuclear submarines (SSBNs). Therefore, it is but natural that Pakistan too is striving for such a competence in order to buttress its second strike capability.

What is unnatural, however, in the efforts being made by Pakistan is the rather makeshift approach being taken to build such a capability. Building SSBNs is beyond Pakistan's material, financial and technological wherewithal at this time; neither is it possible to acquire such submarines from other countries. Though one can never discount the possibility of China providing it with an SSBN, the situation right now is that China itself does not have much to offer. It is still in the process of building its own Jin class SSBNs in numbers that it considers necessary for its own deterrence. Its

earlier SSBNs, the Xia class, had not seen much success given that those boats never really went for any deterrent patrols. China could decide to give these old vessels to Pakistan for training purposes, but there will be a cost involved in terms of international reaction to such an action since it is taboo to provide nuclear capable weapon systems to other countries. In fact, such a Chinese transfer would particularly evoke an adverse reaction given Pakistan's pretty blemished proliferation history.

Under the circumstances, it is quite understandable that Pakistan has opted to make do with what it has for now. *Jugaad* is a particularly South Asian phenomenon that embodies the ability to make out-of-the-box, innovative adjustments to achieve something that is otherwise beyond reach. So, Pakistan's attempt at acquiring a second strike capability is by achieving an innovative fix that simply works around the problem to imaginatively use its extant resources and capabilities at the least cost.

However, a *jugaad* is just that – a *jugaad*, a makeshift fix. It is not the real thing. Pakistan has opted to use the diesel powered submarines that it possesses, but these are not particularly survivable platforms. The basic attribute of an SSBN that makes it ideal for nuclear deterrence is its ability to stay submerged over long periods of time, and hence keep its position unknown. So, Pakistan is seeking notional survivability through an essentially non-survivable platform.

A second problem that will arise is from a mixing up of nuclear and conventional missiles on these submarines. Unless Pakistan decides to designate all its submarines of this class for nuclear delivery – which would obviously deprive its Navy of an effective conventional boat (and it does plan to get 8 more modified S20 Yuan class diesel electric submarines from China) – mixing the two kinds of missiles on the submarines would only complicate Pakistan's own nuclear strategy. While, prime facie, it appears that Pakistan would be able to reap the benefits of ambiguity by mixing the missiles and thereby seek to deter India from taking action against its submarines in the fear that they may be carrying nuclear weapons, in times of crisis such a situation could be prone to a high level of instability. Inadvertent escalation would bring no advantage to the country.

The only gain from such a strategy for Pakistan could be if the acquisition of this second strike capability gives it the assurance of greater survivability of its nuclear arsenal and reduces its pressures to use or lose its arsenal. In case this happens, it would enhance strategic stability. But there is a big question mark on whether Rawalpindi desires such stability at all. Given that its nuclear deterrence strategy is premised on keeping alive the threat of chance, or the risk of escalation, the potential SLCM deployments are only meant to raise risks for India, not mitigate them for its own self. Unfortunately though, one must never forget that nuclear risks equally affect both players. Nay, they

have a bearing beyond the direct players and this *jugaad* should be a matter of wider concern beyond South Asia.

(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies [CAPS])

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