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Issue Brief

Pakistan's Second Strike Capability: A Step Towards Deterrence Stability in South Asia

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January 12, 2017

Developing a nuclear triad capability is one of the key components for a responsible nuclear weapon state like Pakistan to enhance the stability of its deterrent relationship vis-a-vis its larger adversary, India. India is not only pursuing an active nuclear and missile development programmes and Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) programme, but it is also modernising and expanding its conventional forces. From its conventional war fighting doctrines to the development of sea-based nuclear capability, coupled with its vague No-First Use (NFU) policy, all these actions have destabilised regional strategic balance time and again. To ensure its survival against Indian intentions and actions, Pakistan has been left with no choice except to counter India with a credible minimum deterrent posture at all spectrums of any conflict. In response to the Indian naval nuclear capability, the development of a Pakistan's sea-based nuclear capability was inevitable and by avoiding a nuclear arms race, Pakistan only aimed at developing a credible second strike capability.

On January 9, 2017 after conducting the first successful test of Babur-3, a Submarine Launched Cruise Missile (SLCM), Pakistan completed the last leg of its nuclear triad. According to the Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) press release, with a range of 450 kilometres, Babur-3 is a sea-based variant of Ground Launched Cruise Missile (GLCM) Babur-2, which was successfully tested in December 2016.¹ The ISPR further adds that "Babur-3 incorporates state of the art technologies including underwater controlled propulsion and advanced guidance and navigation features, duly augmented by Global Navigation, Terrain and Scene Matching Systems." Babur-3 also incorporates certain stealth technologies, terrain hugging and sea skimming flight capabilities, and can carry various types of payloads.

The missile test not only ensured a credible second strike capability, but it has also restored the strategic balance which was disturbed in March 2016 when India test-fired nuclear capable K-4 Submarine Launched Ballistic Missile (SLBM) with a range of 3000-3500 kilometres from its nuclear power submarine Arihant.² Besides K-4 SLBM, Indian second strike capability has been already ensured through its K-15 Sagarika SLBM with a range of 750 kilometres.³ In addition to this, India is also aspiring to develop three to six Arihant class nuclear submarines which would be capable of carrying K-4 and K-5 SLBMs.

The successful test of Babur-3 has not only helped achieve credible second strike capability for Pakistan, but it has also ensured that Pakistan has taken a right step to ensure strategic stability in the South Asian region. It has also ensured that without compromising over its national security, Pakistan has always followed unilateral strategic restraints and is not indulged in any nuclear arms race. Pakistan's nuclear

policy has been always aimed at avoiding any chances of miscalculation by India in exploiting Pakistan's strategic and conventional space. Whereas, India's broader regional and global military ambitions have been already reflected recently through the test of nuclear-capable Agni-5, with a range of 5000+ kilometres. Major regional powers have already expressed their concerns over India's missile fever. In such a scenario, Pakistan cannot ignore to develop means of its own protection and survival. However, India's growing missile fever will bring negative implications and it will continue to hurt strategic stability in the region.

To ensure a lasting peace in South Asia, a stable deterrent relationship between India and Pakistan is necessary, but India is blindly ignoring all the dynamics of strategic stability. Pakistan's policy is defensive in nature and it has always responded to Indian nuclear ambitions with minimum credible measures. Pakistan wants settlement of deep rooted issues and conflict avoidance, as its military strategies are not aimed at nuclear or conventional war fighting. Therefore, the development of nuclear triad is not solely aimed at deterring India, but it is also aimed at ensuring deterrence stability in South Asia.

Notes and References

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- ¹ "Pakistan conducted its first successful test fire of Submarine Launched Cruise Missile (SLCM) Babur-3" Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR), Press Release, January 9, 2017, https://www.ispr.gov.pk/front/main.asp?o=press_release&date=2017/1/9.
 - ² "India's Bid for 'Second Strike Capability' to Put Pressure on Pakistan, Says SPD Official," *Dawn*, May 15, 2016, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1258420>.
 - ³ "India Successfully Tests Intermediate-Range Nuclear-Capable Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missile," *The Diplomat*, April 10, 2016, <http://thediplomat.com/2016/04/india-successfully-tests-intermediate-range-nuclear-capable-submarine-launched-ballistic-missile/>.