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Issue Brief

Pakistan-China: Ensuring Maritime Security

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China has handed over Pakistan a third 600-ton maritime patrol ship under an agreement signed in 2015. Pakistan's Ministry of Defence Production signed the contract with M/s China Shipbuilding Trading Company



Ltd. (CSTC) which included construction of four 600 tonnes and two 1500 tonnes patrol ships for the Pakistan Maritime Security Agency (PMSA).

The Executive Committee of National Economic Council (ECNEC) approved Rs.13.87 bn for the construction of these ships back in December 2014.¹

After the agreement was signed at Ministry of Defence Production (MoDP) in Rawalpindi, the spokesman of the ministry informed that these ships are being acquired to enhance PMSA's capacity to protect Pakistani resources in its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), and to carry out operations against drug trafficking and illegal immigration under international maritime law.²

The PMSA was established on January 1, 1987 to safeguard Pakistan's maritime interests according to the 1982 United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea (UNCLOS-82). This legal instrument covers, "navigational rights, territorial sea limits, economic jurisdiction, legal status of resources on the seabed beyond the limits of national jurisdiction, passage of ships through narrow straits, conservation and management of living marine resources, protection of the marine environment, a marine research regime and a binding procedure for settlement of disputes between States."³ Moreover, the tasks assigned to the agency under PMSA Act 1994 include:

1. Enforce National and International laws, agreements and conventions in the Maritime Zones.
2. Prevent unauthorized exploitation of economic resources within the Maritime Zones.
3. Protect Pakistani fishing vessels and crew against any threat within the Maritime Zones.
4. Assist and co-ordinate Search & Rescue of the vessels, property and lives in distress at sea.
5. Co-operate with and provide help to other departments and agencies at sea in the discharge of their duties and functions.

6. Perform such other functions as may be assigned by government to protect maritime interests of Pakistan.⁴

Pakistan's collaboration with China on the developments of these ships serves as a testimony of combined strategic interests of both the countries. Since the launch of One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative, the protection of Pakistan's maritime zones has also become a major priority. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is considered as the flagship project of OBOR, and both countries are working harmoniously to ensure its smooth implementation.

The Pakistani authority has been impressed with the quality of the first two ships it received at the end of last year. The ships have performed admirably during various activities such as drills and rescue operations.⁵ The addition of a third ship will significantly bolster Pakistan's capabilities to protect its security and economic interests and also allow for accelerating Chinese ambitions in the region.

Notes and References:

¹ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1187352>

² Ibid.

³ http://www.un.org/Depts/los/convention_agreements/convention_historical_perspective.htm

⁴ <http://www.pmsa.gov.pk/function.php>

⁵ <http://pakobserver.net/china-delivers-third-maritime-patrol-ship-pakistan/>