ISSUE BRIEF

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# ACCIDENT OR AN ATTACK: INDIA'S MISSILE LANDED IN PAKISTAN

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## Introduction

**On March 9, 2022, around 6:50pm in the evening, an Indian projectile flying at supersonic speed landed near Mian Channu, in the Pakistani province of Punjab. A few minutes earlier while the projectile was still inside the Indian territory, it was detected and appeared on the radar screens of Pakistan Air Force (PAF) and the latter continuously monitored it till the impact. Initially, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs and its statecraft remained completely silent on the subject matter. However, on March 10, after a detailed briefing by Pakistan's Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) indicating the flight path and trajectory of the projectile, the Indian statecraft reluctantly began to acknowledge the launch and landing of the projectile inside Pakistani territory (Figure 1). Subsequently, on March 11 (two days later), the India Ministry of Defence and Press Information Bureau acknowledged the incident.**[1]

1 "Statement on Accidental Firing of Missile," *Press Information Bureau*, March 11, 2022, https://pib.gov.in/pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1805148.

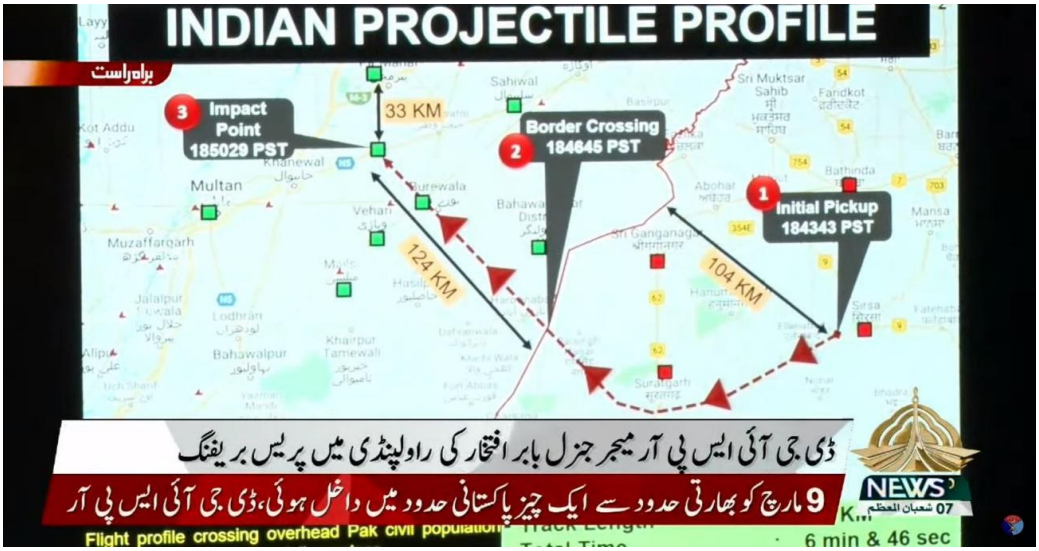


**Figure 1:** The Press Briefing by Director General Inter-Services Public Relations indicated the flight path of the Indian missile (March 10, 2022).[2]

**BrahMos Cruise Missile – A Brief Introduction**

The BrahMos cruise missile is a joint venture between Russia and India and is one of the most advanced terrain-hugging supersonic cruise missiles available today in the defence market.[3] The etymology of the missile's name came from two rivers i.e., the Brahmaputra River of India and the Moskva River of Russia. The BrahMos can be fired from air, naval surface warships, submarines, and land-based fixed and mobile platforms aimed at stationary as well as moving targets with high precision. The latter can be well judged from the fact that the Circular Error Probability (CEP) of the missile is almost 1 metre. The BrahMos cruise missile uses ramjet propulsion technology, which is a "high-speed airbreathing propulsion" system/engine with less moving parts as compared to other propulsion engines (Figure 2).[4] The standard range of the missile is 700 km, and the velocity is around Mach 2 to 4; however, range and velocity vary depending on the launching platform. It can carry around 300 kg conventional as well as nuclear warhead. For navigation and guidance, it uses Inertial Navigation System (INS), Global Positioning System (GPS), and the Russian Global Navigation Satellite System (GLONASS) and in the terminal phase it relies on active radar homing to reach the target. The joint project was started as early as in the late 1990s between the two countries and the first test was carried out in June 2001. Since that time onwards, BrahMos is continuously undergoing

2 "DG ISPR," *Twitter*, March 10, 2022, https://twitter.com/OfficialDGISPR/status/1501951149661769736.
3 Xuan Vinh Vo, "Vietnam–India Maritime Cooperation," *Maritime Affairs: Journal of the National Maritime Foundation of India* 13, no. 1 (2017): 63–72.
4 Paul J. Waltrup et al., "History of Ramjet and Scramjet Propulsion Development for U.S. Navy Missiles," *Johns Hopkins APL Technical Digest* 18, no. 2 (1997): 234.

 

extensive tests and it was also planned to induct a hypersonic version known as BrahMos-II having the velocity of almost Mach 6 to 8.[5]

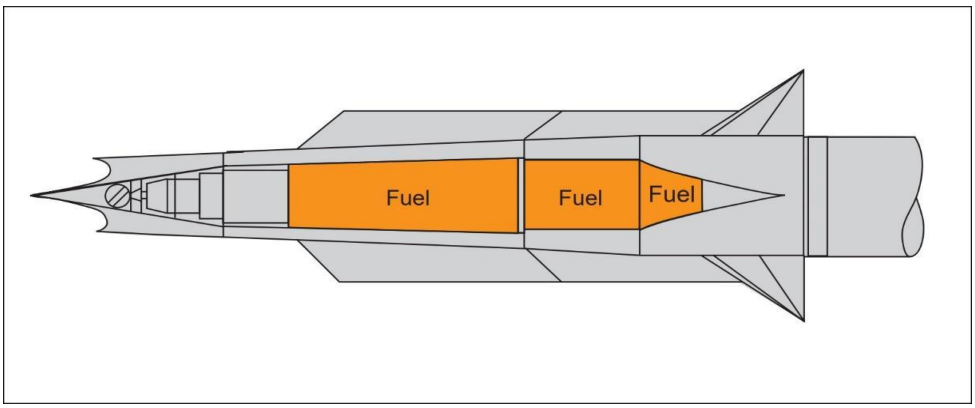


**Figure 2:** Ramjet engine follows Bernoulli's Equation.[6]

After establishing the precision and lethality of BrahMos, it is very important to probe the incident which took place on March 9. Since its inception, the missile was very well received in Indian military as well as civilian circles and its efficacy in striking deep into the enemy territory was equated with a conventional strike on the command-and-control platforms of Pakistan Armed Forces in case of an armed conflict. Also, it was hypothesised that it could be used to launch a surgical strike against Pakistan with high precision.

**Yogi Adityanath and BrahMos**

It is quite surprising that on February 18, 2022, the controversial Hindu Monk and the incumbent Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh Yogi Adityanath vehemently argued that in the next surgical strike against Pakistan, the BrahMos used will be made in Uttar Pradesh's Lucknow region and added that "*Muskuraiye ki aap Lucknow main hain*" (Smile, you are in Lucknow).[7] Prior to this, on December 26, 2021, Yogi and the Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh laid the foundation stone of BrahMos missile manufacturing facility in Lucknow.[8]

5 Gp Capt Ravinder Singh Chhatwal, "India Plans to Export Brahmos Missile to Vietnam," *Centre for Air Power Studies*, June 15, 2016, http://capsindia.org/2016-caps-infocus.

6 Waltrup et al., "History of Ramjet and Scramjet Propulsion Development for U.S. Navy Missiles," 241.

7 "Brahmos Hub Lucknow Will Smile in next Surgical Strike: CM Yogi Adityanath," *The Times of India*, February 18, 2022, https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/lucknow/brahmos-hub-lucknow-will-smile-in-next-surgical-strike/articleshow/89651821.cms.

8 "Rajnath Singh, CM Yogi Lay Foundation Stone of BrahMos Missiles Production Unit in Lucknow," *The Times of India*, December 26, 2021, https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/videos/city/lucknow/rajnath-singh-cm-yogi-lay-foundation-stone-of-brahmos-missiles-production-unit-in-lucknow/videoshow/88510075.cms.

 

Some commentators hypothesised that following Yogi's electoral victory in Uttar Pradesh's Elections, Yogi and his co-conspirators mostly from the ruling right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), fired the BrahMos missile into Pakistan to celebrate their victory. Seemingly, such a hypothesis could not be more than suspicions of cautious people; nevertheless, Yogi's previous statement on February 18, 2022, its insane anti-Pakistan and anti-Muslim rhetoric greatly encouraged such a hypothesis.

**The Wandering Uranium in India**

It is worthy to remember here that India has a highly controversial record when it comes to the safety and security of its Uranium (Figure 3).[9] Only in 2021, more than 7 kilograms of Uranium was recovered from unauthorised personnel by the Indian law enforcement agencies.[10] However, despite the recovered Uranium, it is feared with great concern that such incidents do not happen in isolation and there is always the possibility of a network working with the help of insiders assistance.

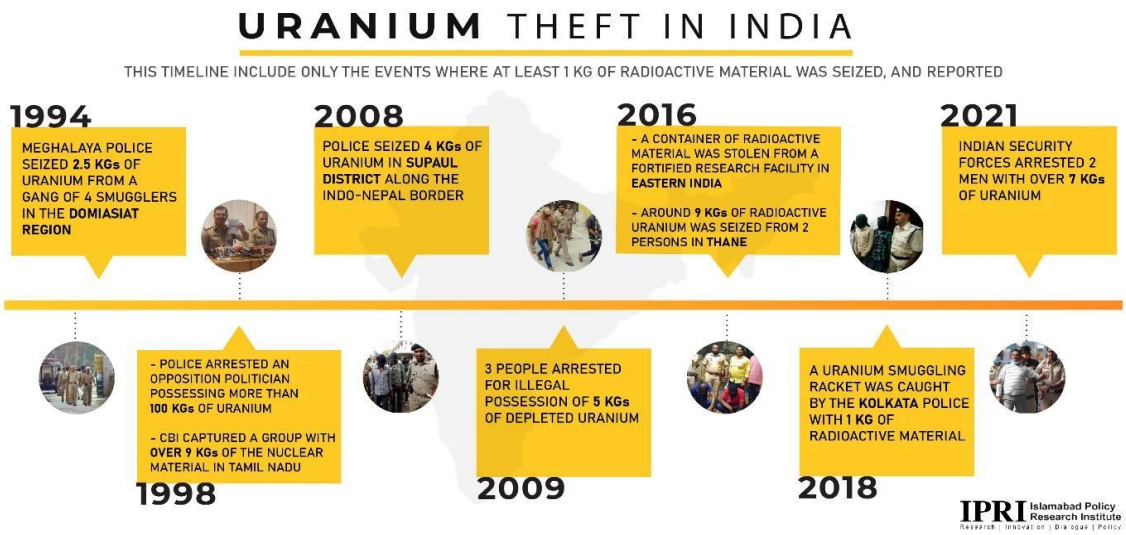


**Figure 3:** A timeline of Uranium theft in India.[11]

**What Pakistan could get?**

For an optimistic country like Pakistan, every challenge brings an opportunity and history attests such a dictum. Though, the missile was flying at supersonic speed; nonetheless, Pakistan could learn

9 Sitara Noor, "India's Radioactive Bazaar," *The Diplomat*, March 12, 2022, https://thediplomat.com/2022/03/indias-radioactive-bazaar/.

10 Abhishek Angad, "Jharkhand: 6 Kg Mineral Uranium Seized, 7 Arrested," *The Indian Express*, June 4, 2021, https://indianexpress.com/article/india/jharkhand-6-kg-mineral-uranium-seized-7-arrested-7343338/.

11 "Islamabad Policy Research Institute," *Twitter*, September 8, 2021, https://twitter.com/ipri_pak/status/1435577116049956869.

 

the BrahMos missile technology from the remains, since the missile was not armed with any warhead and many of the parts have survived the impact. The reverse engineering involving such parts could help Pakistan in developing its own ramjet-powered supersonic cruise missiles.

Also, the PAF detected the projectile inside Indian territory and its air defence could plan to upgrade its existing capabilities to intercept such a high-velocity missile.

**What India could get?**

Following the navigation and guidance capabilities of BrahMos, it is not difficult to conclude that its launch of BrahMos was somehow intentional and deliberate, and India mainly tested the air defence, target detection, and acquisition capabilities of the PAF. It could only be assessed here that following PAF's tremendous Operation *Swift Retort* in February 2019, in response to India's hollow Balakot Strike, and shooting down of 2 Indian Air Force MiG-21 Bison aircrafts, India is desperate in calculating PAF's operational capabilities. And by the recent BrahMos missile launch, it endeavoured to locate lacunas in PAF's air defence systems and capabilities.

**Analysis and Afterthought**

In hindsight, undoubtedly Pakistan showed a remarkable level of strategic restraint and unparalleled patience in relation to its cheeky neighbour India. It could only be horrific to even imagine that had Pakistan behaved in the reciprocal manner and had retaliated to such a firing of an Indian missile.

It is evident from DG ISPR's Press Briefing that the missile was detected well inside the Indian territory; however, it is worthy to probe whether any attempt was made by Pakistan to intercept the incoming flying object. Apparently, the data gathered from radar and the velocity of the flying object made the operational decision-makers to conclude that it could have been a missile and not an aircraft. Ostensibly, no surface to air missile (SAM) was fired to intercept the incoming missile; however, the PAF could have possibly used its electronic warfare capabilities to confuse or even jam the guidance and navigation systems of BrahMos resulting in crashing the missile after travelling 124 kilometres inside Pakistani territory.

It is notable that the PAF acquired the Chinese-built J-10C 4.5-generation multirole combat aircraft on March 4, 2022, and the Indian missile struck five days later.[12] Though, overtly a connection between the two incidents is hard to visualise; nonetheless, India's missile could be an attempt to calm its fear over PAF's growing defence capabilities.

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12 Liu Xuanzun, "Pakistan's Acquisition of Chinese J-10C Fighter Jets Significant for Both Sides: Analysts," *Global Times*, February 20, 2022, https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202202/1252714.shtml.

 

It is quite worrisome that India's negligence and inability endangered innocent lives and thankfully the missile did not hit any civilian airliner, as it travelled well within the international routes on similar altitude.

**Conclusions – Is India an Irresponsible Military Power?**

Is India an irresponsible military power? Following the incident on March 9, 2022, the answer could not be anything else, but – yes. Accident or no accident, it is an unacceptable and irresponsible state behaviour and the culminating point of a reckless military power. The American political scientist Dr. Christopher Clary has time and again raised serious questions about the safety of India's strategic weapons.[13] On the launch of BrahMos missile, Dr Clary noted that "India's opacity about safety and security issues was inconsistent with its nuclear-weapons status and its great-power aspirations."[14] I could only share the same fear as Dr. Clary does.

The Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh acknowledged that the launch of BrahMos cruise missile was an accidental mistake (Figure 4);[15] however, provided the heated environment between India and Pakistan, such an accidental mistake could be both disastrous as well as dangerous.


**Figure 4:** The Tweet by Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh after 6 days of missile launch.[16]

13 Christopher Clary, "Guarding the Nuclear Guardians," *Center for the Advanced Study of India, University of Pennsylvania*, July 15, 2013, https://casi.sas.upenn.edu/iit/clary.

14 Christopher Clary, "The Curious Case of the Accidental Indian Missile Launch," *War on the Rocks*, March 17, 2022, https://warontherocks.com/2022/03/the-curious-case-of-the-accidental-indian-missile-launch/.

15 "Indian Official Acceptance of Accidental Firing of Missile," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, March 12, 2022, https://mofa.gov.pk/indian-official-acceptance-of-accidental-firing-of-missile/.

16 "Defense Minister's Office/RMO India," *Twitter*, March 15, 2022, https://twitter.com/DefenceMinIndia/status/1503606521800044546.

 

It is prayed that the international community especially the great powers take heed of India's irresponsible state behaviour and keep a close watch of its advanced military arsenal from falling into the hands of religious fanatics such as the hate peddler Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath who openly advocated the use of BrahMos cruise missile against Pakistan and its citizens.

It is also prayed that the international community must appreciate and acknowledge Pakistan's strategic restraint for not responding to India's irresponsible state behaviour. It is quite shameful on India's part that it remained silent about the missile, and it only made a statement after Pakistan Army's ISPR foiled India's attempt.

The United Nations must play its role in realising Pakistan's plea for initiating a joint investigation and it must persuade India in doing so to prevent further (fake) accidents. If India continues to run from initiating a joint investigation, then the hypothesis of an intentional and premeditated strike against Pakistan could gain traction.

The international community must remember that Pakistan possesses high-subsonic cruise missiles i.e., *Babur* and *Raad* and such missiles can be launched from various fixed, aerial, naval, and mobile platforms and can aim at stationary as well as moving targets with high accuracy and precision. Pakistan has all the capabilities to respond to any threat – foreign or domestic – and its wish for sustainable peace in the South Asia has to be respected.