

PAKISTAN'S NAVAL UPGRADING IN SOUTH ASIA: A FORM OF BANDWAGONING

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Abstract

Since its inception in 1947 up until the present day, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan has had reason to be wary of India. After three wars and countless border skirmishes with their larger Hindu neighbor, and oftentimes rival, Pakistan views India with a degree of suspicion and threat. However, most of India and Pakistan's most significant conflicts had been, and continues to be fought, on land, mainly in and surrounding the hotly disputed region of Jammu and Kashmir, with both countries investing much the way of military equipment for their armies and border security agencies. However, Pakistan has recently been seeking to improve the capabilities of their navy, a long ignored branch of the Pakistani Armed Forces. This thesis will attempt to examine the reasoning behind Pakistan's choice to turn their attention towards and improve the capabilities of their long neglected navy, and attempt to correlate it with both India's own steadily increasing naval presence in South Asia as well as the People's Republic of China's heightened involvement in the region in the form of the Belt Road Initiative as well as the China Pakistan Economic Corridor.

Keywords: *Pakistan Navy, Naval Capability, South Asia, Regional Powers, Interdiction, Belt Road Initiative, China Pakistan Economic Corridor.*

Background

In 2017 the Pakistani Navy became one of the central points of discussion during a conference dubbed 'Maritime Security in the Indian Ocean: Challenges and Prospects for Pakistan' held in Islamabad. The conference was aimed at recognizing Pakistan's current needs. This was attended by policy makers and maritime experts including naval officers and think-tanks. Speaking in the inaugural session of the conference, Senator Sehar Kamran confirmed that Pakistan's 'policy-making circles' have gradually put more and more attention on the country's role in the regional ocean, also adding that despite 'various restraints' the Pakistani Navy has done its best in fulfilling its duties and responsibilities so far (CPGS 2017: 2). Senator Kamran also added that Pakistan must continue its development of a 'comprehensive and futuristic' national maritime policy which takes into account upcoming challenges in the region in view of Pakistan's national interests. This sentiment is shared and reiterated by Pakistan's Federal Minister for Defense Production, Rana Tanveer Hussain, who stated that the country's geostrategic location at the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean connects it to 'a host of powers' in the region (CPGS 2017: 125-6).

However, the Pakistani Navy is not the branch of Pakistan's armed forces which receives the most attention. It is the Pakistani Army which enjoys and continues to enjoy prominence both in defence policy planning and domestic politics. This is understandable, as the majority of Pakistan's security concerns stems from their troubled and contentious border with India, particularly in the Jammu-Kashmir region. The army's role during the Indo-Pakistan Wars of 1947, 1965, and 1971, and in facing current security concerns in the 21st century, affords them such national primacy and eminence when it comes to dictating what security concerns need to be addressed and where (Jan 2010: 238, Smith 2016: 314-316). Even in 2017, the Pakistani Navy still received the smallest share of the country's defence budget, allocated 11% which amounted to US\$ 940 million (Gady 2017).

Keeping this in mind, it is interesting to note that since 2006, Pakistan has been attempting to improve the capabilities of its Navy. Pakistani Navy was

indicated to begin its first steps towards the revitalization of its intended capabilities in 2006, when Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz recognized that the Pakistani Navy needed to be able to better discharge its capabilities (Global Security 2011). To achieve this, the focus was put on increasing the navy's fleet size, bringing current vessels up to the latest specified requirements, expanding the capability and capacity of their bases, and reinvigorating their domestic shipbuilding capabilities. In regards to increasing the quality of their naval vessels, Pakistan began by seeking foreign shipbuilders able to provide warships suitable to their navy's needs. This is done by securing defence construction and procurement contracts with several countries (Gady 2016; Global Security 2011; Quwa 2018).

This endeavour began relatively quietly, with little fanfare regarding the intent making its way into the media at the time. In September 2009, the first indication that Pakistan's naval upgrading was progressing came with the arrival of the PNS Zulfiqar. The lead ship of its class, it was designed for long range operations in mind to give the navy an increase in their operational coverage (Naval Technology 2014). The PNS Zulfiqar is the first of four F-22P class frigates built as part of a US\$750 million sales and transfer of technology deal between the Pakistani Ministry of Defence Production and China Shipbuilding Industry Corporation (Naval Technology 2014). The next major acquisition of warships for the Pakistani Navy occurred in 2015 when the Ministry of Defence Production signed a deal with the Chinese Shipbuilding Industry Corporation for the sale and transfer of technology of eight conventional attack submarines. The deal was announced by Pakistan's Minister of Defence Production, Rana Tanveer Hussain on 11 October of that year at the Defence Export Promotion Organization (Global Security n.d.). CSIC head Hu Wenming confirmed that the deal had taken place during a press conference on 12 October 2016. The deal would cost between US\$4 to 5 billion, one of China's largest weapons sales to date (Gady 2016; People's Daily Online 2016, Global Security n.d.). Hu Wenming also confirmed that submarine crew training centres will be constructed at Karachi at an undisclosed date in the future (Gady 2016; Global Security n.d). Further, in 2017

and in 1 June 2018, Pakistan again secured sales deals with China for the acquisition of a total of four Type 054 frigates (Khan 2017, Gady 2018).

In addition to acquiring new ships, the Pakistani Navy has also been refurbishing and modernising their force of existing, ageing fleet of diesel submarines to improve their viability and operational profile (Baker 2015, Gady 2015). Throughout 2016 and 2018, Pakistan secured defence contracts with China, the Netherlands, and Turkey for the sale and transfer of technology of several weapons systems including reconnaissance aircraft, short to medium range missiles, as well as other ancillary purchases meant for the navy (Khan 2017, Gady 2018). Speaking at the 2016 change of command ceremony of the Pakistani Navy, outgoing Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Muhammad Zakaullah confirmed that Pakistan's purchase of ships, from among other sources China, is part of an effort to modernize the navy's arsenal and increase its capability to discharge its duties more efficiently in the Indian Ocean. Zakaullah further added that plans to acquire four more frigates are underway, as are orders for submarines and missile capable ships to improve the Navy's anti-ship capabilities in facing developing security dynamics in the region (Khan 2017).

Adding to that, Pakistan has also been directing resources towards their national shipbuilding capabilities and getting their naval bases back to operational standards. In regards to shipbuilding, the only heavy industry in the country, government-owned Karachi Shipyard and Engineering Works, has by 2017 the capability to build patrol vessels for the Pakistani Navy and Maritime Security Agency. locally produce vessels for the country's maritime needs (MarineLink 2007). In December 2017 during the launch of a new domestically built maritime patrol vessel made for the Pakistan Maritime Security Agency, current Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Zafar Mahmood Abbassi stated that the navy faces increased tasks and challenges in the region (The Nation 2017). Speaking to the assembled guests of representatives from the civil government, military, Karachi Shipyard and Engineering Works, as well as China Shipbuilding and Trade Company, he further added that the Navy must be able to address new threats at varying levels in the future (The Nation 2017). The improvement of

their naval bases began modestly in 2006, when Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz and the Defence Committee of the Cabinet approved the necessary funding to modernize the facilities at Jinnah Naval Base situated in Ormara (Global Security 2011). First constructed in 1994 and formally inaugurated in 2000, Jinnah Naval Base became Pakistan's second major naval port after their headquarters at Karachi, 350 kilometers west of the city. By 2016, Jinnah Naval Base boasted the necessary facilities to berth surface warships and submarines, as well as having a unit of Pakistan Marines stationed there ready to be deployed (NTI 2016). Following Ormara, the Pakistani Navy gradually inaugurated more naval bases along the Balochistan Coast including Gwadar, Jewani, and Pasni to act as maritime trade security hub, radar installation, and reconnaissance aircraft base, respectively (Abrar 2016).

Discussion

The matter of Pakistan's choice to upgrade the branch of their armed forces which has received next to little improvement beyond the turn of the millennium in such a scale is distinct. In that, while improvements towards its capabilities are ongoing, it does not receive an increase in prominence anywhere remotely comparable to the Pakistani Army, which still enjoys a form of unchallenged autonomy in the country. Having said that, it cannot be denied that they are conspicuously diverting attention in the form of resources towards their Navy; this can be said as a form of arms buildup. Samuel Huntington divided arms races into two categories: qualitative and quantitative. A qualitative arms race refers to the increase in the amount of military assets and personnel amassed and at the disposal of the state. Qualitative arms races, on the other hand, refers to the technological and operational improvements towards available assets, as well as innovation in doctrine and personnel organization (Huntington 1958: 76). However, even while Pakistan's current attention towards their navy classifiable as a build-up of military power, it cannot quite be said that they are doing so as part of an arms race. Because while development towards their navy is ongoing, it

cannot be compared apple-to-apple with how India has been developing their navy.

Another aspect which must be taken into consideration is the relationship between civil policymakers and the military. In 'The Fall and Rise of Navies in East Asia: Military Organizations, Domestic Politics, and Grand Strategy' Eric Heginbotham puts forward an argument that rapid growth of a country's navy may be attributed to an increase in democratization of its government (Heginbotham 2005: 86-88). He takes examples from how Indonesia, Japan, and Thailand during the 1980s. The growth experienced by the navies of said countries is made possible by civil-military relations between liberal-leaning civil governments and the military. While authoritarian, nationalist governments backing from the army, burgeoning naval powers are largely liberal-leaning countries with access to the ocean (Heginbotham 2005: 91-95). However, Pakistan does not fit into the profile of countries Heginbotham would identify as those which would see having a proper navy as an asset. Throughout its existence, Pakistan was ruled by the army in a dictatorship from 1959 to 1972, from 1977 to 1988, and 1999 to 2008 (Jan 2010: 241-243).

The answer to why Pakistan has committed and continues to commit resources towards its navy can be found in its chief rival, India, and its main benefactor, China. Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, in his work 'Indian Naval Buildup and Southeast Asian Security: A Pakistani View' opines that India is a success story in regards to naval development in South Asia (1991: 86-89). The Indian Navy's growth was spurred on by its effective contribution in the 1971 Indo-Pakistan War in ensuring that East Pakistan is blockaded. By 2017, India is the only country in South Asia which operates a modern aircraft carrier as well as a small but growing fleet of ballistic and attack nuclear submarines (Jalil 2016 2016: 1-5).

Add to this, the history of conflict between India and Pakistan which has largely demonstrated how Indian military capabilities, especially naval capability, which has showcased India as a threat. By the time of the 1971 Indo-Pakistan

War, the Pakistani Navy found itself having a more prominent role, its top priority being the defence of Karachi from Indian interdiction and sabotage. Confident in their underwater assets, the Pakistani Navy deployed its surface fleet in a sea denial role to guard its shores while the submarines moved to the offensive (Sakhuja 2002: 496-498). However in doing so, the Pakistani Navy's assets during the war became unevenly spread, with most of its best ships being allocated to ensure the Indian Navy does not breach West Pakistani waters. This left East Pakistan without the adequate protection necessary to prevent India from interdicting and exerting its influence via naval power in area. While the Indo-Pakistan War of 1971 proved to be decisively won on the ground rather than at sea, the Indian Navy's operations during the war helped influence events on land which contributed to Pakistan's defeat. The Pakistani Navy's apparently lacking performance was also attributed by domestic military authorities as contributing to that defeat (Hiranandani 2000: 231-234). The Pakistani Navy's only claim to success during the war was the sinking of the Indian Anti-Submarine Warfare Frigate INS Kukhri. This success was short lived, as the *Ghazi* was sunk under mysterious circumstances off of the Bay of Bengal, putting a blow to the Pakistani Navy's morale. Furthermore, the Pakistani Navy were unable to prevent the Indian aircraft carrier INS Vikrant from maintaining air superiority and naval blockade in East Pakistan (Hiranandani 2000: 231-234). The Pakistani Navy was also unable to prevent a force of Indian missile boats from essentially crippling them by attacking the headquarters of the navy at Karachi, sinking two ships, irreparably damaging one, and destroying 80 per cent of the navy's fuel supply, as well as crippling Karachi's port operations (Hiranandani 2015). The Indian Army mounted a mechanized offensive into East Pakistan, forcing its surrender in less than a month. Defeat during the 1971 Indo-Pakistan War became a costly learning experience for the Pakistani Navy. The attack on Karachi in particular convinced Pakistani naval planners on the values of offensive sea denial as a means to better utilise their submarines in a more aggressive and coordinated role (Sakhuja 2002: 498). The attack on Karachi, as well as the total blockade of East Pakistan during the war, also served to give a sombre reminder to Pakistan regarding their

opponent. The Indian Navy was capable of exerting superior force compared to the Pakistan Navy. The fall and loss of East Pakistan served to highlight the extent of the Indian Navy's capability to project force and disrupt the vital sea lanes upon which Pakistan's economy depended upon (Sakhuja 2002: 501).

The disparity of military capability between India and Pakistan, then, can begin to explain the latter's decision to upgrade their naval capabilities. In International Relations theory, realists view the concept of 'security' as vital, something states seek to gain amidst an anarchic social order lacking supra-state authority to protect one state from the detrimental actions of another (Walt 2017). Anything which might compromise a state's security can be classified as a threat: either actual, or potential – and therefore still likely to become an actual threat but at the present moment has not (Baldwin 1997: 13-14). Pakistan views India's military power on land, in the air, and at sea as a potential threat towards their security. While India's naval growth is not modelled to be a counter to Pakistan, disparate as they are, the matter still stands that the former's presence in South Asian waters cultivate insecurity, which leads to the appearance of a security dilemma. A security dilemma refers to a condition where one party, 'A', feels threatened by the actions of another party, 'B'. This happens despite one party not performing its actions with intent to harass or threaten the other party. The security dilemma becomes active when the action and reaction from both parties become self-perpetuating. Hertz (in Tang 2009: 591-592) gives six aspects of a security dilemma. 1) The main source of a security dilemma is a state of anarchy which persists over the parties involved; 2) the most immediate cause of a security dilemma is a lack of information between states regarding the intention of the actions that their counterparts take, raising concerns regarding the nature of such an action; 3) a state attempting to address the security dilemma through accumulation of power generates a cycle of power competition; 4) the attempt to address a security dilemma through increase of power may not increase a state's security; 5) a security dilemma may lead to war, but it is not the cause of all wars; 6) the dynamics of a security dilemma is self-reinforcing and permeates a 'vicious

cycle' of states in an anarchical system continually attempting to accumulate power to surpass a perceived threat in order to gain security (Hertz in Tang 2009: 591-592).

This brings us to China, the other power active in the region. Pakistan's efforts in upgrading their navy have relied in no small part upon China's contribution. The F-22 and Type 54 frigates, as well as the conventional attack submarines that the Pakistani Navy has acquired have all been built in China. In addition, China will be extending a long-term, low interest loan to Pakistan's Ministry of Defence Procurement (Gady 2016; Global Security n.d.). China has also played a significant role in aiding Pakistan to shape Gwadar Sea Port into an important 'node' which connects a '21st Century Silk Road' with Pakistan in control of a major maritime trade hub.

Although Gwadar Sea Port had finished construction in 2007, 75% of its US\$ 248 million cost was paid for by China. At the time, however, it failed to become the trade port that Pakistan originally envisioned it would be, largely due to a lack of supporting infrastructure connecting the port to inland territories (Walsh 2013). In 2013, the operation of Gwadar Sea Port was handed over to the China Overseas Port Holdings Company on a 40 year lease contract. The COPHC continues to develop Gwadar Sea Port in several phases, with the initial phase having already been completed, allowing it to augment Pakistan's two other major commercial ports at Karachi and Qasim in handling the increase in seaborne traffic (Kanwal 2018). On 20 April 2015, the China Pakistan Economic Corridor, or CPEC, was signed into agreement between the two countries. It comprises of road networks, railway lines, as well as energy and communications lines which connects Pakistan's Gwadar region with Kashgar in Xinjiang. The project is worth US\$ 46 billion, and is seen by both China and Pakistan as a new, 'game changing' way in increasing regional economic connectivity (Saeed 2016: 2-3). The rapid and extensive infrastructure development brought about by the CPEC synergises with Gwadar Sea Port's reinvigoration into an important maritime trade hub in South Asia, enabling rapidly increased trade and energy movements. Gwadar Sea Port is located close to the mouth of the Persian Gulf just below the Straits of

Hormuz. It is the third commercial port of Pakistan after Karachi and Qasim. Together the older two ports handle 95 percent of Pakistan's sea-borne trade, but their capacities have been fully exploited and there is no scope for further expansion.

Presently, Gwadar Sea Port has the capacity to handle 50,000 deadweight tonnage bulk carriers. Once its additional phases of construction are complete, Gwadar's significance to Pakistan will be multiplied. First, paired with the Pakistani Navy's plan to have shipbuilding and maintenance facilities built at Gwadar, it the port will truly become a 'one stop' destination for international shipping active in the region: it will be a trade port safely protected under Pakistan's new net of naval bases, with the Pakistani Navy's presence in and around Gwadar Sea Port's waters a certainty (Grevatt 2018). Second, with the launch of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor in 2013, Gwadar Sea Port's operation further consolidates Pakistan's geostrategic importance. Gwadar has enabled and will further enable Pakistan to be better able to exploit regional and trans-regional economic prospects previously unattainable. Using Gwadar Sea Port as a nexus, Pakistan could become a middleman, connecting the land and sea routes that span the Belt Road Initiative (CPGS 2017: 20). According to the Gwadar Sea Port Authority's vision statement, "Gwadar deep sea port is the second great monument of Pakistan-China friendship after the Karakoram Highway linking Pakistan and China." Besides Gwadar Sea Port, the China Pakistan Economic Corridor will include transport infrastructure, oil pipelines, power plants, and industrial zones with a capital outlay of nearly \$60 billion. A \$2 billion oil refinery is planned to be set up near Gwadar. The port is being developed by the China Overseas Port Holding Company, to which it was leased by the Pakistan government for 40 years in April 2017. The final expansion of the port and ancillary systems will be undertaken by the Chinese (Kanwal 2018).

In facing a larger power, in this case Pakistan towards India, a state has two choices: balancing or bandwagoning. Balancing is done by a state to preserve its security and interest by increasing the power at its disposal in facing what they

perceive to be the source of threat. However the act of balancing is usually done by states with equal or equally comparable power, through internal means where a state seeks to heighten its grip domestically, or external balancing where resources are pooled with other states towards a specific purpose (Ian 2003: 5). Bandwagoning on the other hand, is done to address and preserve basic security concerns by seeking out protection from a stronger and even threatening power that often entails acquiescing to the will or ambitions of the more powerful state, where a substantial degree of autonomy were given up by the lesser state in exchange for the protection in the form of bonding (Ian 2003, 5-6). bonding is a strategy where states promote autonomy by providing a function or service others may find indispensable i.e. states “bond” the interests of others with their own. As such, other states as well as the preponderant power may have a stake in maintaining the security and autonomy of the state providing the service or function. Second-tier states with lesser influence tend to prefer bonding, because they understand there is not much that they can do on their own to change the distribution of power or level of integration in their favor, especially in the short to medium-term, so these states realize that they can preserve their interests only by ingratiating themselves with the world, as well as with the leading state (Ian 2003, 10-1).

Conclusion

To conclude, the author would like to begin in attempting to identify the key findings that have been brought to light from this research. First, in the second chapter, we see how regional powers with the ability to project its force through a capable and powerful navy might be perceived as a threat by its smaller, less powerful intra-regional neighbors. India’s steady buildup of naval forces can be perceived as a very real threat by Pakistan, which possesses a smaller navy and has historical experience of losing badly to the larger Hindu country. Even if countries in the region like Pakistan does not intend to challenge India’s pseudo-

hegemony over South Asia, they must contend with the fact that at any moment, there exists the possibility that India's naval assets might be deployed against them. With India in particular, historical precedence has shown that they are more than willing to exert offensive force. While Pakistan's livelihood depends on sea lines of communications, as 95% of all trade coming to the Muslim majority country travels through its two busiest Sea Ports, Karachi and Qasim. While the threat that India might interdict and blockade Qasim, or Karachi as they did during the course of the 1971 Indo-Pakistan War, Pakistan did not yet see the significance of developing their navy – which was soundly thrashed by India and faced a landward bias at home. Seeing as while Karachi Sea Port and Qasim Sea Port represent a certain, distinct vulnerability towards military action, they are first and foremost civilian targets, and secondly are situated close to the 'core' of Pakistan's territory, which would be more easily defended by coastal vessels. Easily defensible by a small force and not necessitating a larger naval presence from Pakistan itself to ensure conductivity. This changed with the joint development of Gwadar Sea Port, a central point in the China Pakistan Economic Corridor and one of China's main hubs in its web of Belt Road Initiative. With a third Sea Port located further out, closer to the frontier of Pakistan's borders, a third Sea Port which enables a higher stream of revenue and income the likes of which the country has not seen or experienced before.

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