

## DEFENCE

## Asymmetry in Indo-Pak navies

C UDAY BHASKAR

THE Pakistani Navy (PN) has undergone a major qualitative and quantitative transformation in the last two years and the fact that this aspect has gone largely unnoticed is symptomatic of the larger Indo-Pak relationship. Being members of the Third World fraternity, their respective navies have a Cinderella status, and in Pakistan's case, the predominant role played by the army relegates the navy even further into the background.

For instance, Pakistan has one of the highest army-navy ratios in the world (32:1), (comparable figures for India being 23:1 and for a major maritime nation like the US being 1.4:1). But despite this handicap, in 1988-89, the PN has enhanced its capabilities considerably. It is the qualitative edge acquired that warrants attention.

Any kind of quantitative analysis alone becomes misleading in the case of navies. For instance, the protection of merchant shipping for a maritime state is often invoked as a basic naval function. If size were the sole or predominant determinant, one would then be suggesting that nations like Panama and Liberia should have the largest navies in the world.

Such mechanical formulation is not generally resorted to in the Indo-Pak comparative analysis. Given the basic parameters of coastline, island territories, Exclusive Economic Zone and related maritime assets that obtain on both sides, a purely quantitative bean-count analysis would lead to wrong conclusions. If the force-level of the PN were taken as the base figure, by this kind of justification, the Indian Navy should be seven times the size of the PN. So, a more realistic and holistic appreciation is warranted.

While the PN has no doubt received lesser attention than its sister services, the 1971 experience and the developments in the region in the 80s — particularly Afghanistan and the Iran-Iraq war — the PN has received a fillip, quite unprecedented in the annals of recent naval history. The PN has gone up from eight major surface platforms to 16 in the last three years.

While the greater part of the PN comprised old Gearing class destroyers from the US navy and submarines acquired from France (Agosta and Daphne), in the last two years, the PN has inducted eight destroyers and frigates (the Brooke-Garcia class from the US Navy). This has beefed up its ageing surface fleet. Besides, the PN is to receive by this year-end, three P-3 Orion maritime surveillance cum anti-submarine (MR/ASW) shore-based aircraft from the US to augment its MR/ASW capability. There are reports that the final induction will be of six P-3 Orions and not three. With a range of about 7,500 km, these aircraft will give the PN a large sweep into the south Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean.

Surface ships and MR aircraft apart, the PN has also recently inducted the first batch of 50 marine commandos into service and while the numbers themselves are small, the potentiality of this capability has to be noted.

Hockey offers an interesting point of comparison for an Indo-Pak equation, given the passion and emotion that the game arouses between players of the two nations. But in the naval dimension, while the Indian Navy is undoubtedly the larger,

it may not be unreasonable to suggest that the hockey field is sloping into the Indian goal and that the umpire and the spectators are sympathetic to the other side. This analogy may not be as facile as it seems, for geography bestows certain permanent advantages and handicaps in the maritime dimension — India's peninsular extension into the Indian ocean for example — and this in turn determines the contours of strategy.

In this kind of a framework, given the relative geographies of the two neighbours, the PN's logical strategy would be to impose "sea-denial" in those contiguous areas where the Indian Navy would like to establish "sea-control." Some of the most vital sea lanes of communication (SLOC) for India run from the west coast of the peninsula to the Gulf and given the manner in which the "sea-denial/control" factor is determined, the hockey paradigm is clear and here the latest inductions into the PN come into focus.

Asymmetry has always been an important determinant in any battle. Whether it is stealth or surprise, or the superiority of fire-power, each side in an adversarial relationship attempts to bring about this kind of asymmetry.

In the Indo-Pak naval field, technology has been a major factor. Over the last 30 years, the submarine and the missile fired from underwater have changed the character of naval tactics and it is pertinent to note that both these determinants were first acquired by the PN, giving them that edge in the sea-control/denial business. The PN acquired the first boat, or submarine in 1964 (India acquired a submarine after both Pakistan and Indonesia did) and the missile from that platform in the early '80s. In the current inductions, the PN has the advantage of being missile-capable — with proven missiles such as the Exocet and the Harpoon — in all three dimensions. The recently acquired destroyers/frigates are all missile capable, as are the helicopters capable of being embarked on these platforms, and so are the MR/ASW aircraft and the PN submarines.

Harpoons and Exocets are compatible with most NATO platforms and their allied command and control systems, thereby imparting an advantage of commonality. Additionally, the PN may have access to intelligence and airborne early warning (AEW) from friendly quarters in a hostile situation and this factor becomes a force-multiplier that will enhance asymmetry vis-a-vis India. Thus, all these capabilities when viewed qualitatively increase the ability of the PN to buttress its sea-denial capability, and the possibility of acquiring a nuclear submarine from China — if and when it fructifies — may augment this.

Military aims must necessarily flow from the apex political or national objectives. If one accepts that prolonged low-intensity conflict (LIC), is an accepted feature for Pakistan, then the induction of the first marine commandos into the PN is cause for concern. By the very nature of their nomenclature, these special forces can inflict both damage and harassment to major national assets (such as Bombay High) and abet the traffic in narcotics and infiltration. This again is a new qualitative dimension of the PN that cannot be ignored.

Commander C. Uday Bhaskar, a naval officer, is presently attached with the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses.

# OBSERVER

## PERSPECTIVES

3

HEMINDRA HAZARI

**A**RTICLES on the relative military strengths of India and Pakistan suffer from various myths intentionally perpetrated by Indian defence experts.

They invariably draw a veil over our own capabilities whilst exaggerating that of Pakistan — by highlighting particular acquisitions out of context. The Pakistani threat is deliberately magnified to make our enhanced military budget palatable in times of economic crises. Such analysis goes unchallenged due to the lack of civilian defence experts who are independent of the military and to the gross level of military ignorance in India.

Indian defence analysts studying the Indo-Pak navies contribute to this mythology. They contend that the asymmetry in the Indo-Pak navies favours Pakistan due to four factors; the induction of eight Brooke and Garcia-class destroyers, the acquisition of three to six P-3 Orions for maritime reconnaissance cum anti-submarine warfare (MR/ASW), the deployment of Harpoon and Exocet anti-ship missiles on Daphne, Augusta submarines and on Mirage aircraft and finally the formation of the Pakistani marine commandos.

Their comparative analysis suffers from a lack of binocular vision — only one navy, the Pakistan Navy (PN) is analysed in isolation and its recent purchases given exaggerated importance. These weapon systems cannot be viewed in isolation but must be evaluated against the philosophy, size, history and ambitions of the Indo-Pak navies.

Naval doctrine is inevitably shaped by the history of past combat experiences. The 1971 war is a watershed, from which the Indo-Pak navies have drawn important lessons. The Indian naval task forces spearheaded by Osa-class missile boats, which were towed to Karachi, let loose a surprise attack which sank two Pakistani destroyers and set ablaze port installations. The sea-lanes connecting East and West Pakistan were interdicted. Chittagong was bombed and blockaded by INS Vikrant using the obsolete Albat.

The PN was humiliated, but its submarines scored — sinking the INS Khukri and the PNS Ghazi successfully positioned itself outside Vizag but was sunk by sheer luck.

The 1971 war gave a tremendous boost to the confidence of the Indian Navy (IN). It demonstrated the importance of surface-to-surface missiles and the Osa-class boats were augmented by Nanuchka missile boats and by the Godavari, Taragiri and Kashin-class missile frigates and destroyers. The importance of carrier aviation was realised; the IN acquired Sea Harriers, modernised the INS Vikrant and in the aftermath of the Falklands war which reaffirmed the resurgence of the carrier, purchased its second carrier (the INS Vikram). As the PN was decisively brushed aside in 1971 the IN sought a greater role in the Indian Ocean. India's military supremacy, super-powered navy in the Indian Ocean and

Comparisons between the Indian and Pakistani navies often tend to exaggerate the importance of arms purchases by Pakistan. The Pakistani navy, argues the author, has been a relatively neglected arm of its defence.

## PAK NAVY: MYTHS AND REALITIES.

Diego Garcia as an affront to India's maritime ambitions. With this role in mind and conforming to the late Soviet Admiral Gorshkov's dictum, India has gone in for a three-dimensional bluewater navy having surface, subsurface and aviation capabilities.

The IN, with a manpower of approximately 50,000, has about 40 major combat ships, more than 50 naval combat aircraft and 17 submarines. These systems with a few exceptions incorporate the latest Soviet and Western technologies.

The PN, chastened by its 1971 experience, remained a neglected arm of the Pakistani military. Its main role was sea-denial, to deter Karachi-like raids and disrupt the Indian naval task forces rather than compete by acquiring task force capability. The PN, therefore, purchased small, fast Chinese missile craft for coastal defence, maritime aircraft for reconnaissance and strike and strengthened its submarines with the American Harpoon missiles.

The PN has approximately 13,000 men and about 21 major combat ships, most of which are obsolete, and 13 naval combat aircraft.

The IN's enormous quantitative and qualitative lead in surface vessels was countered, not by a futile race in acquiring more ships, but by focussing resources on air and submarine arms. It is only in the context of these rival naval philosophies that recent developments in the PN are meaningful.

A parallel can be drawn between the development of the Indo-Pak navies and the Soviet-American navies. The carrier task forces form the offensive arm of the American Navy, concentrated around the nuclear-powered aircraft carriers. The conventional Soviet navy is geared towards neutralising the American task force with a combination of shore-based aviation, submarines and ships equipped with anti-ship missiles. The Indian carriers are similarly confronted by Pakistani submarines and the shore-based Mirage aircraft and Exocet

anti-ship missiles.

Apart from highlighting the recent Pakistani naval acquisitions, Indian defence experts ignore the IN's equivalence of these systems.

In comparison to the PN's seven obsolete Gearing-Class destroyers and eight second hand Brooke and Garcia-class frigates, India has five modern Kashin-class missile destroyers equipped with the Kamov helicopters for ASW, three Godavari-class missile destroyers embarking Seaking helicopters for ASW and ASV (Anti-Ship Vessel), six Leander-class frigates and nine old Petya-class frigates. Moreover, the IN will acquire three more Godavari-class destroyers and an untold number of Soviet destroyers.

In comparison to the PN's three P-3 Orions for ASW/MR, India has five long-range Tupolev TU 142M 'Bear' aircraft with a range of 3,000 nautical miles which can cover the Indian Ocean and has a radius which reaches Australia, four short-range Ilyushin IL-38 'May' aircraft.

Approximately 24 medium-range Dornier DO 228 aircraft will be supplemented to this fleet. Although none of the Indian aircraft have ASV, anti-ship missiles can be deployed on them.

Similarly, regarding shore-based maritime strike aircraft, the Pakistani airforce's No 8 squadron of Mirage aircraft is matched by the IAF's No 6 squadron of Jaguars and Canberras embarking the latest generation British Sea Eagle anti-ship missiles.

The real offensive capability of the PN lies in the Harpoon underwater-launched submarine missile with a range of 75 miles. Its deployment has compelled the IN to change the size, composition and deployment of its task forces and to concentrate more on ASW. To counter the Pakistani submarines, the IN has six Kilo-class, three HDW ASW submarines apart from eight obsolete Foxtrot submarines and numerous ASW helicopters, ships and aircraft.

While defence analysts argue that the potentiality of the Pakistani marine commandos "has to be noted", they fail to mention

the potentiality of the Indian Marine Special Force (IMSF) and India's amphibious capability as a means of power projection. The IMSF, formed in 1987 and modelled on the American SEALs, first saw action in Sri Lanka and special Westland helicopters were acquired for their deployment. For amphibious warfare, the IN has four Soviet assault tank landing ships in addition to 14 medium-class landing ships.

It is believed that the Indian army has assigned an amphibious role to an armoured division and an independent infantry brigade, which, in wartime, can be deployed on the Pakistani coastline. The PN possesses no amphibious capability as it lacks landing craft. Therefore, the potential threat of the Indian amphibious and commando force to Pakistan is far greater than the Pakistani commandos are to India.

According to Gorshkov, in his classic *The Sea Power of the State*, the nation's level of socio-economic development determines the size and scope of the navy. Military technological upgradation requires extensive support from the civilian sector. There are no equivalents of the Indian Institutes of Technology in Pakistan and most of the engineering text books are pirate copies of Indian authors. Pakistan has no ship-building or ship-designing capability like India which has indigenously built the Godavari and Taragiri-class ships and designed the Project-15 destroyer and is planning to design an indigenous aircraft carrier. In the long-run, it will be the supply of technology and technologists from civil society to the military which will prove decisive.

While Indian defence experts rightly contend that Pakistan's sea-denial capability has increased, it does not follow that the asymmetry favours the Pakistani Navy, as they have consistently ignored developments and tactics of the Indian Navy. □