

BrahMos : A Choice for South Asian Countries

Introduction

The strategic importance of robust defence capabilities cannot be overstated in the vibrant landscape of geopolitical relations. This article explores the implication of the procurement of BrahMos Missile System (BMS) for southeast Asian countries, investigating its cutting-edge characteristics, potential regional influence, and the calculated deliberations that make it a convincing option for countries affected by modern security challenges. As pressures and security concerns emerge in the southeast Asian region, understanding the role of BrahMos in shaping defence dynamics becomes important, offering understandings into the capabilities of the missile system.

Characteristics

The BMS is a weapon of tremendous devastating potential. It has a maximum range of about 300 km, and a minimum range of 15 km, which provides flexibility of employment of this weapon system along the entire depth of any theatre. The missile has supersonic speed all through its flight and terminal guidance leading to lower dispersion and quicker engagement at target end. Low Radar Cross Section, limited active seeker phase and cruise characteristics with supersonic speed make detection probability by any missile defence system extremely low. This makes the missile highly survivable in an intense anti-missile environment. Variations in flight trajectory can be applied, thus enhancing survivability and degree of success. Its high destructive capability is aided by large remaining Kinetic Energy (KE) on impact.

This is a two-stage missile with a solid propellant booster engine as its first stage which brings it to supersonic speed and then gets separated. The liquid ramjet or the second stage then takes the missile closer to Mach 3 speed in cruise phase. Stealth technology and guidance system, with advanced embedded software provides the missile with special features. The missile's range of about 300 km with supersonic speed all through the flight leads to shorter flight time, consequently ensuring lower dispersion, quicker engagement time and non-interception by any known weapon system in the world. It operates on 'Fire and Forget Principle', adopting waypoint method to navigate its way to the target. Its destructive power is enhanced due to large KE on impact. Its cruising altitude could be up to 15 km and terminal altitude is as low as 10 m. It carries a conventional warhead weighing 200 to 300 kgs. The missile has identical configuration for land, sea, air and sub-sea platforms. Compared to existing state-of-the-art subsonic cruise missiles, the BrahMos has three times more velocity, 2.5 to 3 times more flight range, 3 to 4 times more seeker range and 9 times more kinetic energy.[\[1\]](#)

South Asia's need for BrahMos

Recently South Asian countries, and some others, have shown interest in procuring the BMS to upgrade their arsenal and establish deterrence. China has so far succeeded in creating considerable security concerns in East Asia by her belligerent actions in the South China Sea, in pursuit of hegemonic ambitions. This has forced the countries in the region to reach out to countries like India for further strengthening defence preparedness.[\[2\]](#) To this end, Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand and Indonesia have expressed interest in the system. Talks with Indonesia are in the final rounds and the deal with Philippines has already been operationalised. Some

other countries interested in the weapon system are South Korea, Algeria, Greece, Egypt, Venezuela, UAE, and Chile.

The BrahMos system can enhance capabilities of countries in South Asia, helping to safeguard their coastal borders and maritime interests and also maintain a balanced posture to protect their sovereignty.

Deal with Philippines

The Philippines' acquisition of the BrahMos system can be attributed to several factors. Basically, it has been procured for coastline defence. Maritime confrontations between Beijing and Manila are increasing due to China's irrational ambitions. The acquisition is going to address Philippines' weaknesses in sea denial and island defence operations.

Philippine Defence Secretary, Delfin Lorenzana, who signed the USD 374 mn contract with BrahMos Aerospace Chief, Atul Dinkar Rane, said that "The supersonic missiles will certainly beef up the firepower of the Philippine Navy". Lorenzana added the BrahMos missiles will provide "Deterrence against any attempt to undermine our sovereignty and sovereign rights, especially in the West Philippine Sea"[\[3\]](#) – the official designation for the eastern part of the South China Sea included in the Philippines' exclusive economic zone and claimed by China.

The defence deal will not go down well with China, whose aggressive behaviour in the disputed South China Sea has taken its relations with the Philippines to a fresh low. Lorenzana said in his remarks at the signing ceremony that was conducted via video and a face-to-face meeting attended by officials of both countries. "Its system will provide counter-attack capabilities within the Philippine exclusive economic zone."[\[4\]](#)

The deal with Philippines is important for two reasons, firstly, it marks India as an arms exporter, with a 50.5 per cent share in the joint venture with Russia. Secondly, it establishes the Philippines as an equal protagonist against China. Philippines is also likely to go for follow-on order for a land-based version of the BMS for around USD 300 million. The BMS is considered to be competitively priced relative to similar missile systems available in the global market.

Supplying BrahMos missiles to these countries would thwart Beijing's expansionist policy in the South China Sea, and make it think twice before occupying any of the islands in that region.

The implications of the Philippines becoming the first country to import the BrahMos could be wide-ranging and substantial for the Indo-Pacific.[\[5\]](#) It would warn China, with whom the Philippines has been engaged in a territorial conflict in the South China Sea, and act as a deterrent to aggressive posturing by Beijing.

Thailand's Quest for BrahMos

After getting its state-of-the-art supersonic cruise missile in China's backyard in the Philippines, BrahMos Aerospace has been negotiating with several potential customers.[\[6\]](#) Thailand has shown interest to procure the BrahMos cruise missiles system and has been engaging with India for the same. This shift in geopolitical strategy is evident as Thailand seeks to modernise and diversify its defence capabilities. Considered valuable by China partly due to its geolocation near Bangkok that provides direct access to the Gulf of Thailand eventually leading to the South China Sea, Thailand is rapidly emerging as a hotbed of modernisation in the Southeast Asian landscape.

Thailand has long enjoyed a cozy relationship with China. But the new dispensation is keen to forge stronger ties with other countries, and India is luring it with the fastest cruise missile – BrahMos, in service in the three arms of the Indian military.^[7] It is evident that Thailand wishes to move out of the clutches of China and engage with other economies like India, with the aim of reducing its dependence on Beijing.

Benefits for India

Such deals signify a certain level of trust with India, convergence of interests and worldview. Stronger strategic partnerships between India and southeast Asian nations can create an environment of shared interests.

New Delhi is seeking a boost in defence exports in order to strengthen its defence manufacturing and production. At present, India is the twenty-fourth largest arms exporter in the world, but India's vision is "To expand its defence manufacturing sector and become a bigger arms exporter generating a revenue of \$5 billion by 2025".^[8]

In case India manages to extend such exports to the other countries in this region it could enhance India's diplomatic relations and strengthen strategic partnerships and contribute to India's role as a key player in the global defence market.

Conclusion

With India determined to develop itself as a hub of defence manufacturing, how it handles the sale of the BrahMos would be an important factor in its potential emergence as a net provider of regional security in the Indo-Pacific.^[9]

The strategic aspects of the BrahMos sale and India's assistance to southeast Asian countries should not be minimised. Given that these countries are facing a threat from China and have active ongoing disputes with the Asian giant, helping them increases the burden that China faces in the South China Sea. It is, of course, in India's interest to make sure that China has enough problems in its backyard to divert its attention and reduce the pressure that it can bring to bear on India and the Indian Ocean.^[10]

The BrahMos hence is a fairly cost-effective option for any country wanting to pursue deterrence strategy include deterrence in its strategy. Though expensive, the characteristics of the missile outweigh long-term costs. The BMS emerges as a pivotal asset with the potential to redefine defence strategies in the context of South East Asian countries and bolster regional security.

End Notes

^[1] BRAHMOS Supersonic Cruise Missile, <https://brahmos.com/content.php?id=10&sid=10>

^[2] Pinak Ranjan Chakravarty, BrahMos Missile Sale – A Rubicon Crossed, <https://www.orfonline.org/research/brahmos-missile-sale-a-rubicon-crossed/>

^[3] Rezaul H Laskar, India, Philippines Sign \$375-million BrahMos Missile Deal, Hindustan Times, 28 Jan 2022

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/india-philippines-sign-375-million-brahmos-missile-deal-101643392444656.html>

[4] Rezaul H Laskar, India, Philippines sign \$375-million BrahMos missile deal, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/india-philippines-sign-375-million-brahmos-missile-deal-101643392444656.html>

[5] Harsh v. Pant , The BrahMos outreach, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/brahmos-outreach/>

[6] BrahMos: Thailand Shows ‘Keen Interest’ In Indo-Russian Supersonic Missiles As Delhi Aggressively Pitches Them To ASEAN, <https://www.eurasiantimes.com/backyard-thailand-shows-keen-interest/>

[7] BrahMos: Thailand Shows ‘Keen Interest’ In Indo-Russian Supersonic Missiles As Delhi Aggressively Pitches Them To ASEAN, <https://www.eurasiantimes.com/backyard-thailand-shows-keen-interest/>

[8] Premesha Saha, How India’s BrahMos deal is not just about Philippines but gives a stronger message to the region, <https://www.orfonline.org/research/how-indias-brahmos-deal-is-not-just-about-philippines/>

[9] The BrahMos outreach, op. cit.

[10] Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan, The Strategic Logic Behind India’s Sale of BrahMos Missiles to the Philippines, <https://www.orfonline.org/research/indias-sale-of-brahmos-missiles-to-the-philippines/>

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