Pakistan’s Nuclear Forces

Pakistan tested its first nuclear weapon in 1998, becoming the world’s 7th state to test a nuclear weapon. The exact yields of the weapons in the country’s arsenal are not known, but general estimates are between 5-12kt. Pakistan has not declared a strategic nuclear policy, but appears to maintain “minimum credible deterrence” against India’s nuclear and superior conventional forces. Pakistan has adopted a position of ‘no first use’ against non-nuclear weapon states.

How Many?

Pakistan is believed to have a stockpile of approximately 140 warheads, making it the 6th largest nuclear arsenal. Pakistan is still developing nuclear weapons, and experts project that it will have the 5th largest arsenal by 2025 with 220-250 warheads.

Pakistan has been working towards a sea-based deterrent, and announced that it had successfully launched a nuclear-capable submarine-launched cruise missile from a submerged platform in January 2017. Once this missile is fully developed and tested on-board a submarine, Pakistan will have a nuclear triad.

Air

The F-16 combat aircraft along with some Mirage III and V aircraft are believed to be dual-capable (capable of both conventional and nuclear strikes) and constitute the air component of Pakistan’s nuclear force. Pakistan has approximately 36 warheads for the nuclear air branch. The F-16 A/B has about 24 launchers and a range of 1,600 km while the Mirage III/V has approximately 12 launchers and a range of 2,100km. A new highly accurate air-launched cruise missile, the Ra’ad, has a range of 350+ km.

Sea

In January of 2017 Pakistan tested for the first time the Babur-3, the sea-launched version of the ground-launched nuclear-capable Babur-2. Because the test launch took place on a submerged platform, not a submarine, Pakistan is not yet considered to have a sea-based deterrent.

Ground

Pakistan’s nuclear force consists of short to medium-range cruise and ballistic missiles. The ground arsenal contains about 92 land-based missiles with yields of 5-12kt. Pakistan is in possession of several nuclear-capable road-mobile ballistic missiles, including the short-range Babur, Ghaznavi, Shaheen-1 and NASR and medium-range Shaheen-2 and Ghauri. Pakistan has 6 operational nuclear-capable ballistic missiles. The Shaheen III and Shaheen IA are under development with ranges of 2,750km and 900km respectively.

Pakistan’s development of tactical nuclear weapons has been criticized as destabilizing for severely lowering the nuclear-use threshold. Pakistan has developed the NASR cruise missile, which, with a range of just 60km, cannot hit strategic targets in India. The new weapon has been tested using a road-mobile launcher and is thought to have been created for combating conventional Indian forces.