

China's military Opinion / China Opinion



Opinion

C. Uday Bhaskar

China's missile test from a submarine is no guarantee of regional stability

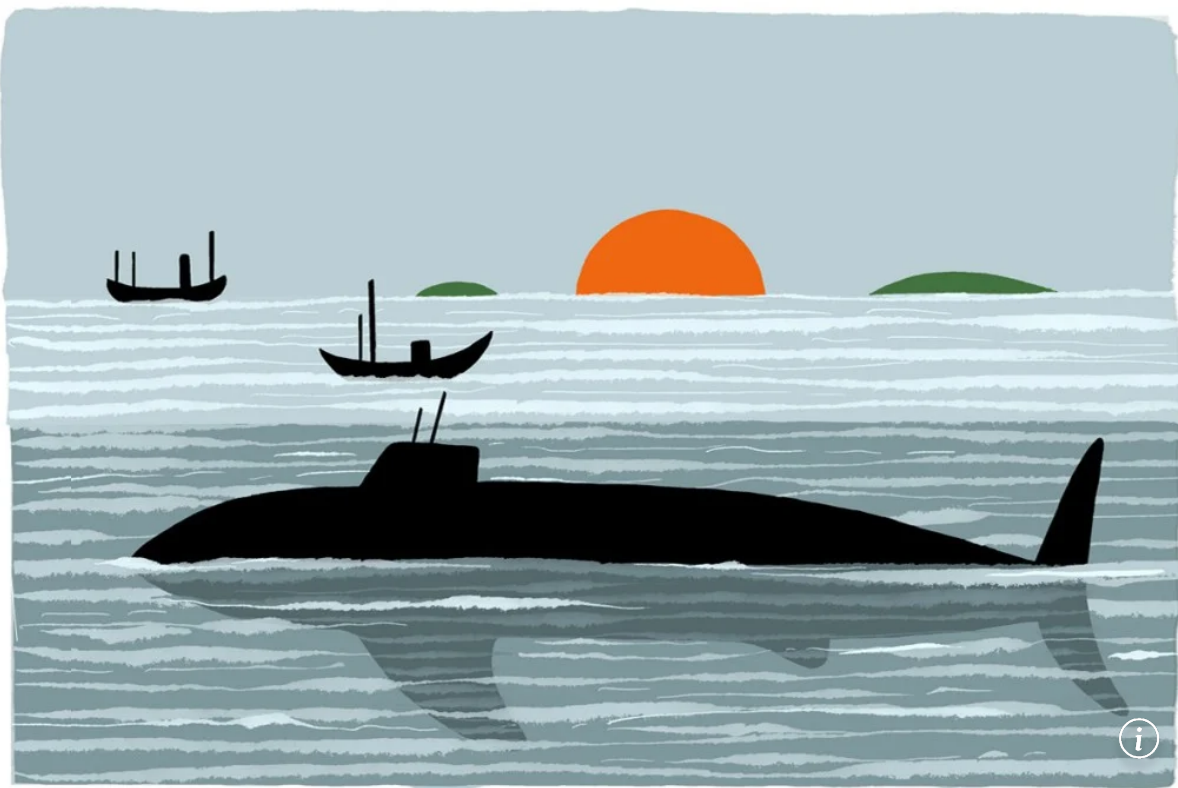
Beijing's ICBM test from a nuclear-powered submarine is a win from a defence perspective but comes with greater responsibilities

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C. Uday Bhaskar

Commodore C. Uday Bhaskar is director of the Society for Policy Studies (SPS), an independent think tank based in New Delhi.

Published: 5:30am, 18 Jun 2020

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China [successfully tested](#) an intercontinental-range submarine-launched ballistic missile on July 6, firing it from a nuclear-powered submarine and joining an elite club that includes the United States, Russia, Britain and France. These five nations are also the permanent members of the UN Security Council.

Analysts believe the missile was fired from China's [Type 094](#) Jin-class nuclear-powered submarine armed with ballistic missiles (SSBN). Submarines in this category which have proven second-strike capability are considered the peak of nuclear deterrence. Major nuclear powers that possess the strategic resolve will inevitably seek to acquire this underwater nuclear deterrent. The US and the former Soviet Union acquired this capability in rudimentary form in the late 1950s.

The July 6 test, in which the missile travelled about 7,300km, was the first publicly disclosed long-range submarine-based test conducted by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy since 1982. This points to both the credibility of China's nascent second-strike capability and the resolve with which Beijing has pursued this goal.

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The missile landed near the Solomon Islands in the South Pacific. Beijing called it “a routine part” of annual military training and said relevant countries had been [informed in advance](#).

The test indicated that the PLA Navy can now [target the continental US](#) from protected bastions close to Chinese waters. The next step for Beijing is to move further towards continuous SSBN patrols. These submarines can maintain a quiet, constant deterrence patrol for months on end. This is how the US and the former Soviet Union maintained their strategic presence at sea during the Cold War, thereby assuaging their insecurity about the other.

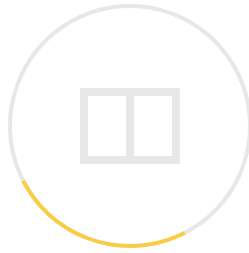
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Underwater nuclear deterrence is the template of nuclear deterrence. Technological advances and the 1962 Cuban missile crisis shaped deterrence

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strategy, and Cold War stability was eventually predicated on the doctrine of “mutually assured destruction” and the presence of SSBNs.



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