

French shipbuilder DCNS hit by massive data leak on Scorpene submarine

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Yesterday, the *Australian* reported that it had seen more than 22,000 pages of leaked documents outlining critically sensitive technical details on Scorpene-class submarines that French state-owned shipbuilder DCNS has designed for Indian Navy.

The Murdoch-owned daily wrote, “The leaked DCNS data details the secret stealth capabilities of the six new Indian submarines, including what frequencies they gather intelligence at, what levels of noise they make at various speeds and their diving depths, range and endurance—all sensitive information that is highly classified. ... It also discloses magnetic, electromagnetic and infra-red data as well as the specifications of the submarine’s torpedo launch system and the combat system.”

The *Australian* saw 4,457 pages on the submarine’s underwater sensors, 4,209 pages on its above-water sensors, 4,301 pages on its combat management system, 493 pages on its torpedo systems, 6,841 pages on its communications systems, and 2,138 on its navigation systems.

This massive leak is a major blow for DCNS, threatening the \$A50billion (€34.3billion) contract it won in April to build a next generation of 12 submarines for Australia. The *Australian* raised concerns over the leak of the documents, fearing the impact on the security of the Australian Navy.

Amid the US “pivot to Asia” and Washington’s war drive against China, Australia is upgrading its navy for war against China and expanding its submarine fleet. DCNS won the highly coveted Australian contract over Germany’s ThyssenKrupp AG and Japan’s state-backed Mitsubishi Heavy Industries and Kawasaki Shipbuilding Corporation. DCNS redesigned its nuclear-powered Shortfin Barracuda to meet Australian specifications for a stealthy, diesel-electric-powered

vessel capable of matching the long range of Australia’s current Collins-class submarines.

The *Australian* noted, “[DCNS’s] proposed submarine for Australia—the yet-to-be-built Shortfin Barracuda—was chosen ahead of its rivals because it was considered to be the quietest in the water, making it perfectly suited to intelligence-gathering operations against China ... Any stealth advantage for the navy’s new submarines would be gravely compromised if data on its planned combat and performance capabilities was leaked in the same manner as the data from the Scorpene.”

Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull admitted that the leak was “concerning,” but tried to downplay its impact for the Australian navy. “It is a completely different model, it is a different submarine,” he said.

DCNS and the French defense ministry have refused to comment, though DCNS suggested that Indian companies might be responsible for the leak. In a statement, DCNS declared that “an in-depth inquiry will be carried out by [French] national security agencies.” These investigations, it added, will determine “the exact nature of the documents that were leaked, and the potential damages to our clients as well as the identity of those responsible.”

Although it did not immediately authenticate the leaked documents, DCNS raised the prospect that the leak was part of an “economic war” waged by its competitors after it won the Australian submarine contract. “Competition is harder and harder,” a DCNS spokeswoman said, “and all methods can be used in this context.”

“There is India, Australia and other prospective clients, and other countries could raise legitimate questions over DCNS. It’s part of the tools in economic

war,” she said.

The *Australian* said the leak apparently occurred in 2011: “[T]he data on the Scorpene was written in France for India in 2011 and is suspected of being removed from France in that same year by a former French Navy officer who was at that time a DCNS subcontractor.” This subcontractor reportedly shared the data more widely while working with a company in Southeast Asia.

If this is the case, the timing of the *Australian’s* report, five years after the leak occurred but shortly after DCNS won the Australian contract, suggests that the leaked documents were indeed presented to the *Australian* as part of economic warfare campaign. A country trying to derive military advantage from its knowledge of the Scorpene would have no reason to announce that it had this information and allow India or DCNS to devise countermeasures. DCNS’ competitors, on the other hand, have every reason to discredit it by revealing its inability to hide sensitive information.

In any case, the initial reactions to the leak point to the extraordinarily sharp economic and military tensions of contemporary capitalist society. While corporations expect their competitors to use underhanded or illegal means as a matter of course, revelations of key details via leaks or cyber-warfare immediately has vast military and diplomatic implications amid the explosion of military tensions and rivalries in Asia.

As explosive tensions mount between the United States and China, Washington fears that US stealth torpedo-launch systems installed in the French-built Australian submarines could be compromised and exploited by China. “If Washington does not feel confident that its ‘crown jewels’ of stealth technology can be protected,” the *Australian* wrote, “it may decline to give Australia its state-of-the-art combat system.”

After the leak of Scorpene data, Indian Defense Minister Manohar Parrikar said that India is investigating the leak to “find out what has happened.”

In a statement, the Indian Defense Ministry said, “The available information is being examined at Integrated Headquarters, Ministry of Defence (Navy) and an analysis is being carried out by the concerned specialists. It appears that the source of leak is from overseas and not in India.”

Indian officials acknowledged that the issue was very

serious. They expressed concerns that India’s regional rivals, China and Pakistan, might have gained access to the sensitive technical data on the submarine. The same type of submarine is also used by Malaysia and Chile and is soon to be used by Brazil.

Uday Bhaskar, a former naval officer, said that the leak of sensitive technical data would seriously damage the submarine: “A submarine is all about not getting detected—and all the technical details relate to the acoustic signature of the submarine, and the kind of noise it makes. With all these things in the public domain, a navy of another country can tune in and pick up signals off our boat.”



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