



## INS VIKRAMADITYA: THE ARRIVAL OF A GAME CHANGER

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*“In support of the nation’s growing strengths and responsibilities, the Indian Navy is determined to create and sustain a three dimensional, technology enabled and networked force capable of safeguarding our maritime interests on the high seas and projecting combat power across the littoral.”*

*The Indian Navy Vision Document*

As the geopolitical dynamics keeps on shifting, so does the defence strategy keep on reinventing themselves with changing times. The aforesaid transformation is not only in sync with contemporary security needs, but also strives to create a protective environment to withstand the current and altering threat perceptions and challenges faced by the nation’s security in all the three dimensions, air, land and water. Having said so, the recent induction of INS Vikramaditya, the reincarnation of Admiral Gorshkov aircraft carrier is another step in this direction. It is an endeavor to safeguard the nation’s interest in the blue waters. Carrying forward India’s ambitious naval modernization plans, the new induction will not only augment the maritime capabilities of the country but also bring it one more step closer to the vision to strengthen its presence in the Indian Ocean and to establish itself as a blue water navy. A classical definition of a blue water navy is a maritime force which can operate 320 km away from its shores.<sup>1</sup>

The two decade long journey of acquiring this modified Russian Kiev-class aircraft carrier which began in 1994 witnessed lot of crests and troughs, from the signing of MoU in 1998, to the final seal of the deal in 2004 and the eventual commissioning in Indian Navy in 2014. The process faced many a hurdles from the increasing costing to refurbish an old, damaged, the Admiral

Gorshkov from \$ 974 million to 2.3 billion , misplacing of the blueprints for the Gorshkov in 2004 by the Russians, not good to go electrical and mechanical components, hiccups in reaching or maintaining warship's top speed due to boiler malfunction, clumsy planning, substandard workmanship, poor management, suspicion of financial mismanagement, internal political pressure to break the deal etc. <sup>ii</sup> Although the \$ 2.3 billion deal was finalized in 2004 after three-year long renegotiations, however it, took nearly a decade and overcoming of all these hurdles to transform the old Admiral Gorshkov into INS Vikramaditya.

A word on the technical aspect of the INS Vikramaditya, the aircraft carrier is one of the biggest-ever warships to be inducted into India Navy, with a weight of- 44,500 ton, length of: 900 ft, width of- 174 ft, propulsion: of 8 turbo pressurized boilers, 4 shafts, speed of 32 knots, crew of: 2000 (600 Airwing), airwing- 30 fixed, rotary, elevators- 2 and so on.<sup>iii</sup> Its airwing will include over 30 aircraft, comprising an assortment of multirole ship-based fourth generation fighters MiG 29K/Sea Harrier, airborne early warning Kamov 31 & Kamov 28, Sea King for anti-submarine warfare (ASW) missions, Indian Navy's first Advance Light Helicopter (ALH) -Dhruv and Chetak helicopters. <sup>iv</sup> The warship is loaded with fourth generation air superiority fighters, array of weapons including anti-ship missiles, beyond the visual range air-to-air missiles, guided bombs and rockets, long range air surveillance radars, advanced electronic warfare suite, capability of creating "a surveillance bubble" of over 500 km around the ship, state-of-the-art launch and recovery systems, computer-aided Action Information Organisation (CAIO) system, provisions to generate power of 18 megawatts and so on. <sup>v</sup> The aircraft carrier has successfully completed its sea and aviation trials in July and September 2013 and will replace the aging INS Viraat. The country's second aircraft carrier will be stationed at the Karwar Naval base in Karnataka.

The induction of INS Vikramaditya has also brought to light a number of reactions and statements, two of which deserve a special mention. These exhibit the future of India and Russia bilateral ties in defence cooperation and also highlight the expectation attached with the new arrival. Firstly, while underlying the importance India-Russia relations, the PM Manmohan Singh described it as 'a special and privileged strategic partnership' and Moscow as an "indispensable" partner for India's defence needs". INS Vikramaditya is one such example of New Delhi's relationship with Russia "unmatched by any other relationship". <sup>vi</sup> Secondly, in the view of Vice-Admiral Shekhar Sinha, Commanding-in-Chief of Western Naval Command, "With the commissioning of Vikramaditya, the Navy's reach and ability to respond in real time to developing

situations in our area of responsibility would see a quantum leap. Aerial assets like UAVs, MIG 29 K fighters, P-8I and Dhruv have added punch to our quiver<sup>vii</sup>.

Although India's own emergence as a global power contributes to the reordering of the international hierarchy, the faster and more dramatic rise of China, the relative decline of European powers and Japan, and growing doubts about the United States' ability to sustain its primacy after the global financial crisis are generating an international environment that will test many of the current premises of Indian foreign and national security policy.<sup>viii</sup> In this backdrop and amidst the altering world order and threat perceptions, the continuous modernization of Indian defence security apparatus and redesigning or revising of defence strategies to secure nation's interest are some of the ways to cope up with the pressing demands and the new challenges of the modern world and the arrival of INS Vikramaditya is one such example.

***(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies CAPS)***

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<sup>i</sup> Zeb, Rizwan. 'Military Modernization.' March 2011. URL Accessed on: Nov 15 2013. <http://www.saglobalaffairs.com/regional/834-military-modernization.html>

<sup>ii</sup> "Vikramaditya class". URL Accessed on Nov 15 2013. <http://www.jeffhead.com/worldwideaircraftcarriers/vikram.htm>

<sup>iii</sup> ibid

<sup>iv</sup> 'Antony to commission INS Vikramaditya in Russia'. IANS. URL Accessed on Nov 15 2013. <http://newindianexpress.com/nation/Antony-to-commission-INS-Vikramaditya-in-Russia/2013/11/15/article1892172.ece>

<sup>v</sup> ibid

<sup>vi</sup> "Russia will remain an 'indispensable' partner for India: Manmohan". "Press Trust of India". URL Accessed on October 21 2013. <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/russia-will-remain-an-indispensable-partner-for-india-manmohan/article1-1138004.aspx>

<sup>vii</sup> "ALH squadron adds to Navy's fire power". URL Accessed on November 13 2013. <http://newindianexpress.com/states/kerala/ALH-squadron-adds-to-Navys-fire-power/2013/11/13/article1887731.ece>

<sup>viii</sup> Mohan, C Raja. "Managing Multi-polarity: India's Security Strategy in a Changing World". May 2012. [URL]: <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Articles/Detail/?id=143988>