



### INDIA'S MASSIVE MILITARY ACQUISITIONS

By  
**Muhammad Abbas Hassan**  
*Research Associate*

Edited by  
**Najam Rafique**

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*(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)*



The turbulent 2019 saw a number of regional and international developments that have left a lasting impact on the geopolitical structure of South Asia. The year also saw Pakistan and India on the brink of war after India violated all international norms and carried out a strike across the international border inside Pakistan in February 2019. The Indian attempts were thwarted by Pakistan and also managed to capture one of their pilots. The iron fist response by Pakistan saw Indian Prime Minister chanting for advancement in the Indian air force. His exact words were, “Had Rafale been there, things would have been different.”<sup>1</sup> This reflects the current Indian mind set. As a result, Indian military during the year 2019 made some massive acquisitions and inductions to its arsenals.

It is pertinent to note here that the Indian defense budget for the year 2019-20 stood at \$ 61.96 billion, which is the same as 2018-2019 budget in Indian Rupees parity. However, certain custom duties were waived to facilitate the Indian military modernization in the same resources.

The February shake up resulted in Indian air force humiliation across the globe and its capability was exposed to the rest of the world. To cover up the tracks, India managed to receive the first of the

<sup>1</sup> Video on Business Today, March 4, 2019 <https://www.businesstoday.in/videos/news-reel/had-rafale-been-there-things-would-have-been-different-pm-modi/324302.html>

36 Rafale jets from France in October 2019.<sup>2</sup> France has also obliged the Indians due to this deal at the United Nations Security Council when it vetoed the Chinese motion on Kashmir.<sup>3</sup>

The Indian Air Force also acquired 8 out of the 22 Apache helicopters from the United States in 2019. The helicopters were inducted into the Indian Air Force in September.<sup>4</sup> The Apache has a variety of weapons which includes 70 mm Hydra rockets, air-to-ground Hellfire missiles and air-to-air Stinger missiles. For the very first time, the Indian Air Force has acquired helicopters which can fire air-to-air missiles. The helicopter also mounts a bullet-proof cockpit which would add extra cover to the 30 mm chain gun installed in the machine.<sup>5</sup> It should be highlighted that India has already tested the air version of the Brahmos missile from Russian origin Sukhoi fighter jet and the air-to-air missile of Apache is an addition to its defense capabilities.<sup>6</sup>

The close partnership with America has also allowed the Indian Air Force to acquire heavy lift Chinook helicopters to its inventory. In 2019, India received a total of 6 out of the 15 Chinook helicopters. The heavy-duty helicopter would allow the Indian Air Force to move heavy equipment to difficult terrain and would be used in possible operations against Pakistan and China.<sup>7</sup> India has also acquired building buster bombs from Israel which can only be used by the MiG squad.<sup>8</sup> India claims that these bombs were used in the Balakot air strike in February 2019.

The Indian Navy also received uplifts in its capabilities. It entered into a US\$ 3 billion lease agreement for a nuclear submarine with Russia. The submarine called INS Chakra III is actually an Akula-1 class nuclear-powered attack submarine and will be a part of the Indian Navy for 10 years after the handover.

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<sup>2</sup> India formally gets the first Rafale fighter jet, "DD News" <http://ddnews.gov.in/national/india-formally-gets-first-rafale-fighter-jet>

<sup>3</sup> France Vetoes Chinese Bid To Bring Back Kashmir To UNSC, "Menafn" December 18 2019 <https://menafn.com/1099440500/France-Vetoes-Chinese-Bid-To-Bring-Back-Kashmir-To-UNSC?src=Rss>

<sup>4</sup> Shaurya Karanbir Gurung, "Eight US made Apache attack helicopters inducted into IAF" *The Economic Times* September 4, 2019 <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/eight-us-made-apache-attack-helicopters-inducted-into-iaf/articleshow/70955482.cms>

<sup>5</sup> IAF gets its first fleet of 8 Apache AH-64E attack helicopters, *The Asian Age* September 3, 2019 <https://www.asianage.com/india/all-india/030919/iaf-to-induct-8-apache-ah-64e-attack-helicopters-today.html>

<sup>6</sup> Franz-Stefan Gady, "India's Air Force Test Fires BrahMos Supersonic Cruise Missile From Su-30MKI Fighter" *The Diplomat* May 23, 2019 <https://thediplomat.com/2019/05/indias-air-force-test-fires-brahmos-supersonic-cruise-missile-from-su-30mki-fighter/>

<sup>7</sup> Two new heavy-lift Chinook helicopters for IAF arrive in Gujarat, *Live Mint* July 09, 2019 <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/two-new-heavy-lift-chinook-helicopters-for-iaf-arrive-in-gujarat-1562616165253.html>

<sup>8</sup> Manjeet Singh Neg, "IAF receives first batch of Spice 2000 bombs used during Balakot airstrike" *India Today* September 15, 2019 <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/iaf-receives-first-batch-spice-2000-bombs-balakot-airstrikes-1599456-2019-09-15>

over to India.<sup>9</sup> In partnership with France, Indian Navy commissioned second Kalvari-class Submarine and named it INS Khanderi in September 2019. With the induction of INS Khanderi, Indian Navy now has 15 conventional submarines and 2 nuclear submarines in its fleet.<sup>10</sup> The Indo-French partnership related to the building of 6 submarines is called Project-75. Under the project, the submarines will be built by French Naval Group (formerly DCNS) and India's Mazagon Dock Limited.<sup>11</sup> Indian Navy also plans to induct 7 Stealth frigates to its fleet. INS Nilgiri, the first of the frigates was launched for sea trials in September 2019 at the Mazagon Docks.<sup>12</sup>

In September 2019, *The Economic Times* reported that according to an official document, the Indian military has finalized a roadmap to spend \$130 billion for the military uplift of its forces. The modernization would take place over the next 5 to 7 years.<sup>13</sup> This plan is in line with the acquisitions and inductions already made during 2019, and are a threat for the region pushing South Asia one step closer to the brink of war. India has a long history of using false flag operations as an excuse to carry out actions against Pakistan. One can also not rule out any false flag operations from India as a justification to use its newly acquired military arsenal against Pakistan. The Prime Minister of Pakistan has already indicated that any false flag operation by India in Azad Jammu and Kashmir would be dealt with a stronger blow as Pakistan Army was fully ready to thwart any aggression.<sup>14</sup>

The Indian desires to become a regional hegemon have not only destabilized the region, but also casts a shadow of fear over its local population. For Pakistan it is a threat on multiple folds as not only India is trying to contain China, but also encircling Pakistan by making inroads into the Middle East. The close friendship of Afghanistan with India is no secret. In this scenario, the massive Indian military acquisition and induction is not only a challenge to regional peace but also a reflection of Indian war mongering ideology.

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<sup>9</sup> Vivek Raghuvanshi, "India signs \$3 billion contract with Russia for lease of a nuclear submarine" *Defence News* March 8, 2019 <https://www.defensenews.com/global/asia-pacific/2019/03/08/india-signs-3-billion-contract-with-russia-for-lease-of-a-nuclear-submarine/>

<sup>10</sup> "Indian Navy plans to build 24 submarines including 6 nuclear attack submarines", *Naval Recognition*, December 31, 2019 <https://www.navyrecognition.com/index.php/news/defence-news/2019/december/7871-indian-navy-plans-to-buid-24-submarines-including-6-nuclear-attack-submarines.html>

<sup>11</sup> Ankit Panda, "Indian Navy Commissions Second Kalvari-class Submarine" *The Diplomat* October 02, 2019 <https://thediplomat.com/2019/10/indian-navy-commissions-second-kalvari-class-submarine/>

<sup>12</sup> Press Trust of India, "INS Nilgiri, Navy's India-Made Stealth Frigate, Launched For Sea Trials" September 28, 2019 <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/rajnath-singh-launches-ins-nilgiri-indian-navys-self-made-stealth-frigate-for-sea-trials-2108703>

<sup>13</sup> *The Economic Times*, 10 September 2019 <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/india-to-spend-a-whopping-usd-130-billion-for-military-modernisation-in-next-5-7-years/articleshow/71053542.cms?from=mdr>

<sup>14</sup> Parvez Jabri, "Any Indian false flag operation to be dealt with stronger blow: PM" *Business Recorder* August 30, 2019 <https://www.brecorder.com/2019/08/30/520818/any-indian-false-flag-operation-to-be-dealt-with-stronger-blow-pm/>