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Issue Brief

Analysis of Indian Naval Capabilities: Implications for Pakistan

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Introduction

The Indian Navy is the fifth largest in the world. In recent years India has undertaken a rapid modernization of its Navy in a drive to develop blue-water capabilities and increase its prowess in the Indian Ocean and beyond. This is also part of India's efforts to attain regional and global power status. However, India's drive to a rapid build-up of its Navy is seen as a threat by many states in the region. It has especially heightened the threat perceptions of Pakistan whose main security threat comes from India. Moreover, India is also operationalising the Naval leg of its nuclear triad which would give it a second-strike capability. This has a huge impact on the nuclear deterrence equation between the two traditional rivals.

Indian Naval Capabilities

As of 2016, the Indian Navy has a strength of 79,023 personnel and a large fleet consisting of 2 aircraft carriers, 1GAH amphibious transport dock, 9 landing ship tanks, 14 frigates, 10 destroyers, 1 nuclear powered submarine and 14 conventionally powered submarines, 25 corvettes, 7 minesweeping vessels, 47 patrol vessels, 4 fleet tankers and various auxiliary vessels.¹

India is constantly improving and adding to its naval capabilities. India plans to spend at least \$61 billion on expanding the size of its navy by about half in the next decade or so.² In order to realise that goal, it has not only tried to boost its indigenous naval vessels building capacity in recent years, but also done a fair amount of acquisitions from abroad. India has ambitions to build a 160 plus-ship navy, comprising three aircraft carrier battle groups by 2022. India is building and acquiring around 40 warships and submarines. These acquisitions/development include stealth destroyers, anti-submarine corvettes and stealth frigates.³

India already possess 2 aircraft carriers - the Russian origin INS *Vikramaditya* in service since 2013and INS *Viraat*. India is also constructing the INS *Vikrant* due to be inducted by 2018-19, and has plans for the development of the larger INS *Vishal*.The navy is also inducting MiG-29K multirole aircraft and

¹ <https://southfront.org/military-analysis-indian-navy/>

² David Tweed and N.C. Bipindra, "Submarine Killers: India's \$61 Billion warning to China," *Bloomberg*, July 28, 2015

³ Interview of Chietigj Bajpae by Srinivas Mazumdaru, "Naval Build-up Reflects India's Ambition to Project Power," *Deutsche Welle*, <http://www.dw.com/en/naval-buildup-reflects-indias-ambition-to-project-power/a-18275292>

Kamov-28 and 31 helicopters to deploy from its aircraft carriers.⁴ India has also purchased 8 maritime reconnaissance and anti-submarine aircraft from Boeing Co. for \$ 2.1 billion in 2009 and approved an order for 4 more aircraft.⁵ These acquisitions would immensely improve Indian reconnaissance capabilities and would provide the Indian Navy strategic outreach in the Indian Ocean.

India is also improving its amphibious warfare capabilities. It is inducting 4 Landing Platform Docs (LPD) to join the amphibious warfare fleet alongside INS *Jalashwa*. These LPDs would be 200 meters long and be able to transport battle tanks, heavy trucks, Armored Personnel Vehicles and other heavy machinery. These would also have a point missile defence system and a close-in system for defence.⁶ This again improves India's naval warfighting capabilities.

India is also focusing on enhancing the country's submarine fleet with the construction of *Scorpenes* from France, the leasing of some submarines from Russia, and upgrading its Russian and German-made submarines. The *Scorpenes* submarines will be constructed with the help of France's state owned DCNS for estimated \$ 4.6 billion.⁷ These submarines can stay submerged for a week making it difficult to track them. This emphasis on increasing their submarine strength would give India strategic reach in the Indian Ocean and better war capabilities.

Indian Navy also possesses the Akula class nuclear powered submarine INS *Chakra* (SSN) which can remain underwater for months – unlike conventional submarines that have to surface often. The submarine is armed with 36 torpedoes and Klub anti-ship missiles. The Indian Navy is also developing three to six indigenous Arihant class nuclear ballistic missile submarines (SSBN). Six indigenous nuclear attack submarines (SSN) are also planned, and India has been negotiating with Russia to lease a second Akula class attack submarine.

The development of Arihant class nuclear powered submarines has also completed the development of India's nuclear triad. These submarines are capable of carrying nuclear armed ballistic missiles. The INS *Arihant* has already completed its critical diving tests and undergone the test launch of unarmed ballistic

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Masood-ur-Rehman Khattak, Eurasia Review, March 26, 2011, <http://www.eurasiareview.com/26032011-indian-militarys-modernisation-a-threat-to-strategic-stability-of-south-asia-analysis/>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

missiles. The hulls of another two SSBNs, including INS *Aridhaman*, have already been completed and these vessels are expected to be launched by 2017.⁸

India is also developing nuclear armed ballistic missiles that can be launched from warships or nuclear submarines. In March 2016, India conducted a test of the intermediate range submarine launched ballistic missile, the K-4 with a 3500 km range, from the INS *Arihant* in the Bay of Bengal. India's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) is also working on K-5 which will be an Intercontinental Ballistic Missile with 6000 km range. India is also developing K-15 or *Sagarika* intermediate range SLBM with a range of 700 – 1500 km to be integrated with Arihant class submarines. India has also tested and inducted the nuclear-capable short range ballistic missile *Dhanush*. It is a naval variant of *Prithvi III* with 500 kg payload and a 350 km range. Indo-Russian joint production has also helped the former acquire Talwar class frigates. These frigates are armed with eight *Brahmos* missiles, capable of carrying nuclear warheads. *Brahmos* missile can be launched from submarines, surface ships, land and air.⁹ The development of full range of nuclear capable missiles for its naval platforms will complete its nuclear triad, thus enabling India to have second strike nuclear capability.

Implications for Pakistan

India's motivation is to build a blue water navy and a formidable force in the Indian Ocean and beyond. Part of it is motivated by India's dream to emerge as a global power. This naval build-up is also a result of closer strategic alignment with the US and its allies in order to counter-balance China's rising power. The build-up is especially aimed at deterring China from establishing a foothold in the Indian Ocean.

Having a formidable naval capability also means that India can be a regional hegemon in the Indian Ocean, as well as the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal. This is a threat to all the littoral states of the Indian Ocean, since India can deny access to the ocean's resources, communication and free movement at will.

An even greater worry is that India is all set to nuclearise the Indian Ocean. This is a threat to all the littoral states, but especially for Pakistan. For Pakistan, which aims to maintain an effective nuclear deterrent against India, the introduction of the latter's nuclear triad is a threatening development, which further exacerbates its security dilemma vis a vis India. Indian naval nuclear developments will

⁸ Ali SarwarNaqvii, "A Nuclearised Indian Ocean," The News, May 20, 2016, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/121303-A-nuclearised-Indian-Ocean>

⁹ Ibid.

qualitatively alter the strategic balance between India and Pakistan. It might force Pakistan to also introduce a naval nuclear capability of its own in order to rebalance the deterrence equation between the two countries. This would only start a pointless arms race in the Indian Ocean.

India's extensive naval build-up and its nuclear developments at sea would irreversibly disturb the strategic stability in the region. The Indian Ocean would be in danger of becoming the most nuclearised of the seas with great powers already present, India joining in, and perhaps Pakistan following suit.

This also brings into focus the fact that while Pakistan is being dubbed the "fastest growing nuclear power" India's vertical nuclear proliferation is being swept under the carpet. In fact, India's strategic partnerships with the US and other major powers is growing, and they are helping India develop its naval nuclear assets. This also exposes the double standards of the world powers that are such ardent supporters of nuclear non-proliferation.

India has a huge economy and large budget that it has dedicated to the expansion and up-gradation of its naval capability. This is partially to develop a blue water navy, and also, in part, to counterbalance China's growing influence in the region. However, Indian naval build-up is a direct threat for Pakistan, as it will give India a fearsome war fighting capabilities at sea which would be a great disadvantage for Pakistan in times of war. Indian naval expansion is undermining the naval stability in the region. Pakistan has a small economy and cannot afford to develop a large fleet. However, Pakistan needs to have a minimal naval capability to defend its vital interests at sea. It also needs to develop a minimal naval nuclear capability to ensure a second strike capability in order to preserve the credibility of its nuclear deterrent.