



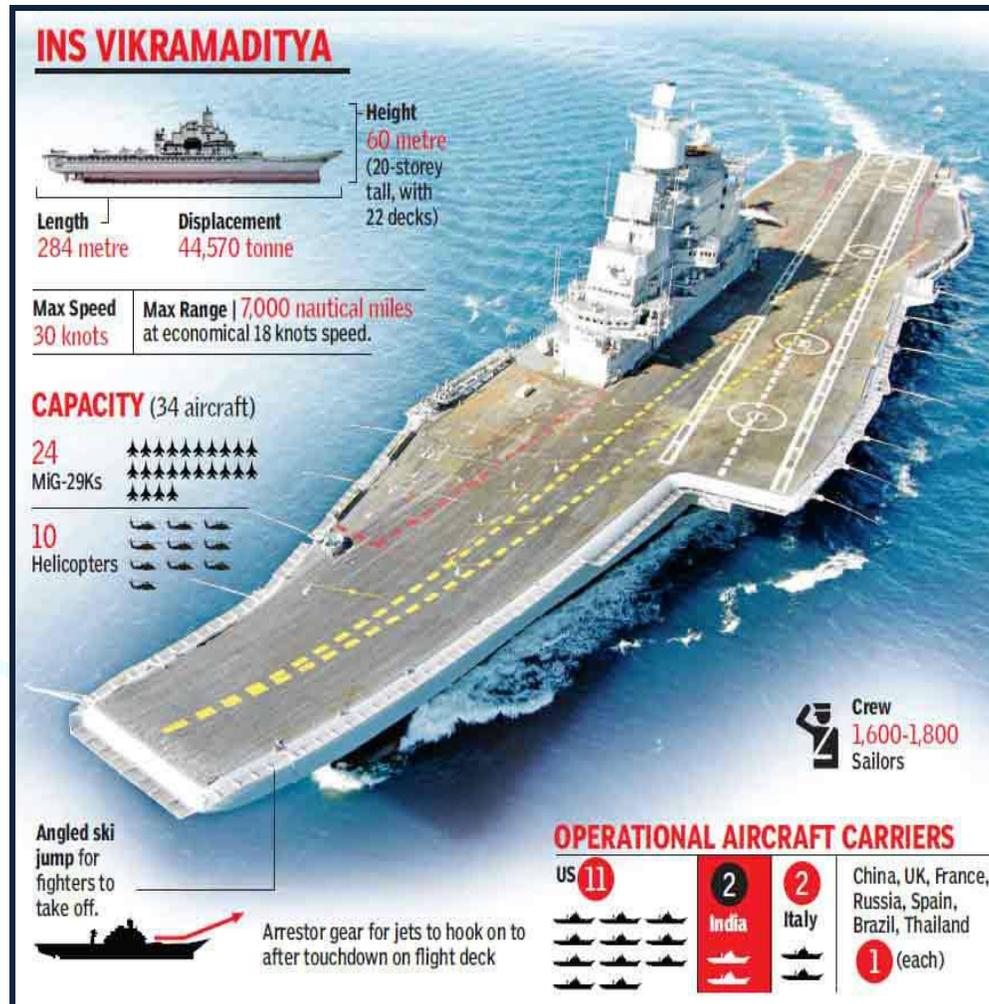
## **RELEVANCE OF INS VIKRAMADITYA IN SECURITY PERSPECTIVE OF INDIA**

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The handing over of INS Vikramaditya aircraft carrier to India will further enhance not only the operational capabilities of the Indian Navy but also help in safeguarding the nation's maritime security of India. INS Vikramaditya is a welcome replacement to India's solitary aircraft carrier INS Viraat, now 55-years old.<sup>i</sup> The refurbished aircraft carrier, earlier Admiral Gorshkov, originally named Baku, was integrated into the Northern Fleet in 1987.<sup>ii</sup>

The handing over of the aircraft carrier has also come as a positive development for the bilateral- military relations between India and Russia, and amidst the finalizing of a deal for sale of 48 aircrafts of Sukhoi Su35 between Russia and China.

The rechristened INS Vikramaditya is a potent floating airfield with supersonic fighters packed with sensors and weapons ready to fulfill India's blue-water naval aspirations far across the oceans. Few of the salient features of INS Vikramaditya include its designed length of about 260 m and it is almost at its maximum breadth of 60 m. The main landing strip is ready. Over 80% of the structure, containing about 2300 compartments has been fabricated, over 75% has been erected, all the major machinery, such as the two LM2500 Gas Turbines developing a total power of 80 MW, the diesel alternators capable of producing about 24 MW and the main gear box have been fitted.<sup>iii</sup>



**Source:** *INS Vikramaditya will be a game changer<sup>iv</sup>*

The key to developing credible capabilities for predominance of maritime power is the need of the hour for India in order to suit its changing geo-political scenario. India has to formulate a maritime strategy that would combat the vast, varied and complex maritime security threats and challenges. They span from terrorism and piracy to drug trafficking, seaborne attacks, international crime, gun running, illegal immigration, environmental pollution and movement of contraband.<sup>v</sup> Mumbai 26/11 attack is an example of seaborne terror attacks on India. The Somali pirate crisis has driven shipping costs in the western Indian Ocean endangering shipments of fuel, fertiliser and other goods to India. Furthermore, a substantive portion of India's natural gas, oil and coal imports come across the waters. India's ability to win militarily if forced into a conflict is inextricably linked to

its ability to secure the air, sea and land on its periphery.<sup>vi</sup> Hence, pre-positioning of maritime forces in order to provide quick reaction against emerging threats would be necessary.

At present, India is the only Indian Ocean country with aspirations comparable to China to become a major maritime power. Singapore, Pakistan, Oman, and Iran are all capable of creating strong littoral forces, but do not seek to go beyond their immediate periphery.<sup>vii</sup> Power-projection is the name of the geostrategic game. Hence, the induction of INS Vikramaditya in the Indian Navy will be a game changer as the aircraft carrier is capable of moving 600 nautical miles a day, ready to unleash its fighters, helicopters, missiles to take the battle to an enemy's shores if it comes to that.<sup>viii</sup>

In addition, there is an emerging maritime activity of other powerful actors like the US which has as many as 11 Nimitz-class "super-carriers" deployed around the globe. Each is over 94,000-tonne, powered by two nuclear reactors and capable of carrying 80-90 fighters. China, too, is now furiously building new carriers — dubbing them "symbols of a great nation"<sup>ix</sup> — its first ever aircraft carrier, another retooled Soviet-made craft called the "Liaoning" was put into service in 2011 amidst tensions with Japan over contested islands.

Moreover, the rise in China's interest in energy security and energy requirement will increase her interest in the Indian Ocean region. In order to protect her sea lines of communication (SLOC), China, in all probability, will increase her naval power in this region. Her intent to do this has been made amply clear by China's participation in the anti-piracy patrols off the Somali coast. As India's own maritime trade and energy requirements increase, a sizable presence of Chinese Navy in the Indian Ocean Region will run counter to India's interest. Furthermore, in pursuance of sea power, China is likely to look for bases in India's area of interest. The construction of a modern port at Gwadar (on the Pakistani coast) by the Chinese is a case in point.<sup>x</sup>

Hence for India, an aircraft carrier like INS Vikramaditya will be a force-multiplier. It allows the naval force to project airpower worldwide without having to depend on local bases for staging aircraft operations.

With India trying to establish itself as a great power in international politics, it becomes important for India to pursue its strategic ambitions by strengthening its air, land, and sea power. Furthermore, the rise in economic and trade activities, seaborne terror attacks on Indian soil, illegal arms trade and piracy issues have made it imperative for India to formulate a maritime architecture to combat such maritime threats.

Moreover, the rise of regional powers like China with which India has been involved in major conflicts; territorial spats and the recent standoff along the disputed border have implications for India's national security. Although, China is currently focused on South China sea and lacks the requisite capability to operate for extended periods in the Indian Ocean region, the induction of INS Vikramaditya will help India to insulate its own backyard and pursue its strategic and security interests with freedom and without fear.

*(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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## End Notes

<sup>i</sup> Pandit Rajat; *INS Vikramaditya will be a game changer*, 14<sup>th</sup> November 2013. <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/INS-Vikramaditya-will-be-a-game-changer/articleshow/25724093.cms>

<sup>ii</sup> [http://voiceofrussia.com/2013\\_11\\_16/Vikramaditya-aircraft-carrier-handed-over-to-Indian-Navy-2137/](http://voiceofrussia.com/2013_11_16/Vikramaditya-aircraft-carrier-handed-over-to-Indian-Navy-2137/)

<sup>iii</sup> Sharma, Rajiv; *The strategic significance of India's first indigenous aircraft carrier INS Vikrant*, [http://indian.ruvr.ru/2013\\_08\\_12/INS-Vikrant-SHARMA/](http://indian.ruvr.ru/2013_08_12/INS-Vikrant-SHARMA/).

<sup>iv</sup> Pandit Rajat; *INS Vikramaditya will be a game changer*, 14<sup>th</sup> November 2013. <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/INS-Vikramaditya-will-be-a-game-changer/articleshow/25724093.cms>

<sup>v</sup> Vice Admiral Sangram S Byce (Retd); *India's Maritime Security Challenge: The Power Equation in the Indian Ocean Region*, <http://inpad.org/res111.html>.

<sup>vi</sup> <http://www.hindustantimes.com/Comment/Editorials/Naval-capability-crucial-for-security-economic-interests/Article1-1152543.aspx?hts0021>

<sup>vii</sup> Bhasker Uday and Kemp Geoffrey; *Maritime Security challenges in the Indian Ocean*, Centre for the National Interest, Washington DC, February 2011. <http://cftni.org/2011.7.18FullWorkshopSummary.pdf>

<sup>viii</sup> Pandit Rajat; *INS Vikramaditya will be a game changer*, 14<sup>th</sup> November 2013. <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/INS-Vikramaditya-will-be-a-game-changer/articleshow/25724093.cms>

<sup>ix</sup> *ibid*

<sup>x</sup> Byce, Vice Admiral Sangram S (retd). "India's Maritime Security Challenges - The Power Equation in the Indian Ocean Region". [URL]: <http://inpad.org/res111.html>