INDIA'S NAVAL POWER AND NAVAL STRATEGY

Dr. Cenk TAMER

China's increased presence in the Indian Ocean provides a rationale for India to strengthen its navy and rise as a naval power. India needs a modern navy in order to stay ahead of the increasing geopolitical competition in the Indian Ocean and to fight security threats. Admiral Alfred T. Mahan, the founding geopolitical theorist of maritime domination, emphasized the strategic importance of the Indian Ocean with these words: "whoever achieves naval supremacy in the Indian Ocean will be a major player on the international area."[1]

Trying to counter China's growing naval fleet, India launched the first domestic aircraft carrier, INS Vikrant, which cost 2.5 billion dollars after an 18-year production process.[2] Indian Prime Minister Narendre Modi described this development as "a historic day and an important achievement". As a matter of fact, China launched its third aircraft carrier in June and expanded its fleet. India already has two aircraft carriers. Aircraft carriers are important in case of a possible war in distant seas. The number of aircraft carriers is critical in terms of being a naval power in the world. This can be a valuable criterion among states competing for world hegemony.

Increasing its destroyers and frigates as well as domestically produced aircraft carriers, New Delhi added two more warships

1 "Indian Navy: A Formidable Blue Water Force in the Making", *Sps Naval Forces*, https://www.spsnavalforces.com/story/?id=651&h=Indian-Navy-A-Formidable-Blue-Water-Force-in-the-Making, (Date of Accession: 06.09.2022).

2 "India Launches Its First Home-Built Aircraft Carrier as the Nation Looks to Counter China's Growing Naval Fleet", *Daily Mail*, https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11174041/India-launches-home-built-2-5billion-aircraft-carrier-INS-Vikrant-counter-China-threat.html, (Date of Accession: 06.09.2022).

to its fleet in May this year. These are important as they show India's determination to develop its domestic defense sector. Defense Minister Rajnath Singh said that the warships project reflects India's strategic strength and success in the navy.[3]

Delays in the modernization of the navy can become intolerable after a point. Because China is far ahead of India in access to strategic ports and military bases. Therefore, India has no choice but to be assertive in the development of its naval power. In this context, to counter China, India has set out to modernize its navy, especially attack submarines, missile-carrying warships and aircraft carriers.

In order to increase its naval power, India has focused on cooperation with allied states, especially the USA and France, and has also strengthened its solidarity with Japan and Australia within the framework of the Quadruple Security Dialogue (QUAD). In addition, the establishment of a strategic alliance between India-France-Australia in 2018 was also on the agenda.[4]
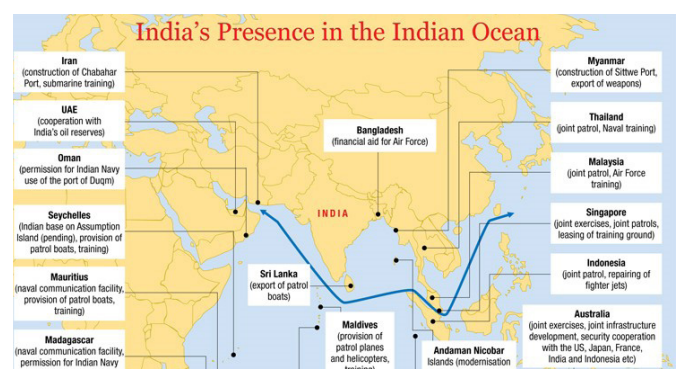
Actively participating in multilateral naval exercises, India also conducts exercises with the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as the regional powers Thailand, Indonesia and Japan. It is reported that India currently has a total of 295 naval assets, including 2 aircraft carriers and a dozen submarines.

Indian Navy

Indian Naval Forces is trying to fill the gaps in areas such as aircraft carriers, anti minelayers, submarines and integrated helicopters. It has also focused on improving surveillance capabilities through long-range maritime reconnaissance aircraft and high-altitude aircraft.

India has developed a 10-year plan to establish a naval service command in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, as well as build new facilities and strengthen existing military facilities on the islands for additional troops, warships, aircraft and drones. Andaman and Nicobar have become not only strategically important, but also a critical base for India's efforts to install air defense radars (HADR). The Navy's third aviation headquarters is located in North Andaman. India has also established air bases and Navy surveillance facilities in Madagascar and Mauritius.

Figure 1: India's Presence in the Indian Ocean

Source: "Indian Navy: A Formidable Blue Water Force in the Making", *Sps Naval Forces*, https://www.spsnavalforces.com/story/?id=651&h=Indian-Navy-A-Formidable-Blue-Water-Force-in-the-Making, (Date of Accession: 06.09.2022).

3 "India's Naval Strength is Growing but Not Enough", *Rasha Anirveda*, https://raksha-anirveda.com/indias-naval-strength-is-growing-but-not-enough/, (Date of Accession: 06.09.2022).
4 *Ibid.*

The Information Management and Analysis Center was established near New Delhi to monitor threats from the sea and increase air area awareness. This center shares real-time information of ships with friendly countries in order to increase maritime security. The Indian Navy has made great progress in the development of combat capabilities in recent years, as well as in the construction of weapons and equipment. According to the Maritime Capability Perspective Plan, the Indian Navy aims to have 200 ships, 500 aircraft and 24 attack submarines by 2027. Currently, the Navy has about 132 ships, 220 aircraft and 17 submarines. In addition, India plans to modernize its submarine fleet with new Arihant-class nuclear-powered attack ships.

When we examine the aircraft carriers of India, we can see that frame. New Delhi already has 2 aircraft carriers. The first is the Soviet ship "INS Vikramaditya". The ship, which has a capacity of 34 aircraft, was purchased in 2004, modernized and launched in 2013. The second aircraft carrier is the domestically produced ship "INS Vikrant". The production of the ship, which has a crew of 1,600 and a capacity of 30 aircraft, started in 2013 and was launched in 2022.[5] The third aircraft carrier is still in the planning phase. India ranks sixth in the world in aircraft carrier area after Russia, USA, France, England and China.

The Indian Navy, which is described as the "Blue Water Navy", has great challenges in front of it to have a world-class military capacity. One of these challenges is budget support. India's military spending has not increased significantly over the past five years. Although it is considered to be the 7th strongest navy in the world, the budget allocated to the navy is far behind compared to other world powers. Only 15 percent of India's total military spending goes to the navy.

Compared to its allies in QUAD, approximately 30 percent of the US military expenditures and approximately 25 percent and 23 percent of the military expenditures of Australia and Japan are allocated to the navies, respectively. While official statistics from China are hard to reach, reports show that China overall spends nearly three times as much on its military as India.[6] Despite being referred to as a "Sea Nation", India's Navy budget is lower than both its allies and its strongest rival.

Another factor hindering the development of the Indian Navy is the country's defense industry production capacity. Currently the country has 5 major shipbuilding factories; however, these large-scale shipbuilding industries have developed problems of low production and poor organization and management due to sever e bureaucratic barriers. Because of these chronic problems, the construction of large military ships takes a very long time. Another notable problem is that some ships under construction will gradually replace those that are decommissioned.

---

5 "India Launches...", *a.g.m.*

6 "Indian Navy...", *a.g.m.*

For example, on average, one out of every 2-3 ships replaces retired ships. This is why the Navy takes time to grow.

Apart from this, the Indian Navy needs to adopt new age technologies such as data analytics and artificial intelligence in order to produce fast solutions. For example, the Indian Navy has so far focused more on enlarging the fleet rather than increasing the efficiency of its submarine fleet. Therefore, India has a long way to go before it can become a major global player and develop its naval power and naval strategy in harmony.

Naval Doctrine and Strategy of India

The Indian Navy strives to become a leading naval power in the region and increase its dominance in the far seas. India's naval strategy is based on expanding its naval power in both the Indian Ocean and the Pacific. This is part of India's foreign policy principles of "look right" and "move eastward". The Navy is expanding its activity and engagement in the near seas, starting with 7516 km of coastline. But the Navy's role is not just limited to protecting the coastline. There are numerous challenges, including maritime terrorism, anti-piracy, smuggling, illegal and unregulated fishing, poaching and maritime security. The Indian Navy has also begun to focus on distant naval missions such as protecting the Indian diaspora in the Pacific, evacuating it during natural disasters or providing humanitarian aid to this diaspora. In this context, the number of port visits to the states of the region and participation in naval exercises with international partners has increased considerably.

In particular, the completion of the construction of new aircraft carriers and attack submarines, the modernization of the navy, and the development of maritime awareness capabilities will facilitate India's ability to counter the growing Chinese influence in the Indian Ocean.[7]

Trying to strengthen the geopolitical conversation by signing military access agreements with the states on the Indian Ocean coast, New Delhi has signed agreements that allow naval visits to the strategically located deep sea port Sabang of Indonesia and Duqm Port of Oman. India has also signed logistics agreements giving access to the port facilities of the US base at Diego Garcia in the middle of the Indian Ocean and to the French base on Reunion Island.

Comparison of Indian and Chinese Navy

India has more than 67,000 active personnel in the navy, including around 10,000 officers and 57,240 sailors. The Chinese Navy has more than 235,000 personnel in active service, including up to 20,000 marines.[8] In addition, the Chinese Navy has a larger and more advanced submarine fleet than India. For example, China's submarine fleet consists of more than 70 submarines,

7 "A Rising India in the Indian Ocean Needs a Strong Navy", *CSIS*, https://www.csis.org/npfp/rising-india-indian-ocean-needs-strong-navy, [Date of Accession: 06.09.2022].

8 "India vs China: A Comparison of the Indian and Chinese (PLA) Navies", *Naval Technology*, https://www.naval-technology.com/analysis/india-vs-china-indian-and-chinese-pla-navies-compared/, [Date of Accession: 06.09.2022].

including 7 nuclear ballistic missile submarines (SSBN), 12 nuclear attack submarines (SSN), and more than 50 diesel attack submarines. India's submarine fleet includes 15 diesel attack submarines and 2 nuclear ballistic missile submarines (SSBN). Thus, China's submarine fleet is three times larger than India's.

When we compare aircraft carriers, we can see that frame. As mentioned above, India already has 2 aircraft carriers. The first is the ship "INS Vikramaditya", which was bought from Russia and launched in 2013. The second aircraft carrier is the domestically produced ship "INS Vikrant" and was launched in 2022. The third aircraft carrier is still in the planning phase.

China currently has 3 aircraft carriers. The first is the Soviet-made Kuznetsov-class ship. The ship, which entered service in 2012, was built on the skeleton of the Varyag aircraft carrier, which China bought from Ukraine in 1998. The second is a ship that was modernized with a prototype from the Soviets and launched in 2017. This is the first domestic ship of China. However, since it does not belong to him as a design, it is not considered domestic according to some. China's third aircraft carrier, which entered service this year, is considered the country's first domestic aircraft carrier in terms of both design and production.

There is a similar difference in the area of the destroyer. China has a much larger destroyer fleet than India. Advanced guided missile destroyers

in China's inventory are armed with long-range anti-ship cruise missiles, anti-submarine rockets, in addition to surface-to-air missiles. These destroyers have 128 vertical launch system (VLS) silos. The Indian Navy's INS Kolkata class destroyers have 32 surface-to-air missiles and 16 anti-ship missiles in vertical launch cells. In this sense, it can carry fewer missiles than China. In addition, the BrahMos missile, the world's fastest supersonic cruise missile used by India, has a shorter range than the YJ-18 supersonic missiles used by the Chinese Navy. China has a total of 41 destroyers, while India has 10 destroyers. There is also a big difference in terms of frigates. India has 13 frigates against China's 49 frigates.[9]

Figure 2: India-China Rivalry in the Indian Ocean

Source: "India And China face off", *IP Defense Forum*, https://ipdefenseforum.com/2019/04/india-and-china-face-off/, [Date of Accession: 06.09.2022].

The Boeing P-8I aircraft, one of the world's most advanced maritime patrol aircraft, allows the Indian Navy to track China's movements in the Indian Ocean and also supports anti-submarine and surface warfare missions. China, on

9   "Comparison of India and China Military Strengths (2022)", *Global Fire Power*, https://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-comparison-detail.php?country1=india&country2=china, [Date of Accession: 06.09.2022].

the other hand, uses maritime patrol and anti-submarine warfare aircraft equipped with airborne early warning and electronic warfare mission capabilities. India does not have enough multi-functional attack helicopters to use in surveillance missions. China, on the other hand, has started to make progress in this field by incorporating its newly developed Z-20 type helicopter.

Conclusion

India has focused on strengthening its dominant position in the Indian Ocean in response to the threat of attack from China. India's Command in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands is located in a strategically important area. Sea trade from China to Europe via the Strait of Malacca passes through the Andaman Sea. Therefore, the strong presence of the Indian Navy here points to a security weakness for China.

Although India has an important naval capability, overall its naval power is still insufficient. Shipbuilding has been largely neglected. It does not have a shipyard other than 5 shipbuilding factories.[10] In contrast, China has the world's largest shipbuilding industry. Its share in world ship production is 40%. The share of Indian shipyards in global production is 0.045%. Only 10% of Indian-flagged ships are built in Indian shipyards.

The construction of the first domestic aircraft carrier is interpreted as a critical step towards India's becoming a global naval power. In addition, India aims to

build 24 submarines domestically by 2030, 6 of which are nuclear powered. It currently has two nuclear submarines. One of them is still in the testing phase. It is expected to have 2 more nuclear submarines by the end of 2025. The nuclear submarine "INS Chakra", leased from Russia, was returned last year after completing its mandate.

Based on all these factors, we cannot say that India is a global naval power. To achieve such a status, India must first invest in the shipbuilding industry. The country, which has a coastline of over 7 thousand kilometers and gives its name to the Indian Ocean, is in danger of increasing the military presence of its biggest rival, China, in the region. Current modernization efforts are not enough to catch up with the level of the Chinese Navy. India feels besieged by China in its near seas. The Chinese military research ship arriving in Sri Lanka has deepened India's fears. If India does not take radical steps to develop its naval power, it will lag far behind China.

---

10   "India Losing Naval Edge", *Tribune India*, https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/comment/india-losing-naval-edge-379859, [Date of Accession: 06.09.2022].

ANKASAM STRATEGIC INSIGHT

AUTHOR

Dr. Cenk Tamer graduated from Sakarya University, Department of International Relations in 2014. In the same year, he started his M.A. at Gazi University, Department of Middle East and African Studies. Tamer, completed his M.A. in 2016 with his thesis titled "Iran's Iraq Policy After 1990", started to work as a Research Assistant at ANKASAM in 2017 and was accepted by Gazi University, International Relations Phd Program in the same year. Tamer, whose areas of expertise are Iran, Cults, Sufism, Mahdism, Identity Politics and Asia-Pacific, completed his doctorate at Gazi University with his thesis titled "The Identity Building Process and Mahdism in the Islamic Republic of Iran Within the Frame of Constructivism and Securitisation" in 2022. He is currently working as an Asia-Pacific Expert at ANKASAM.

ANKASAM
STRATEGIC INSIGHT