



INDIAN NAVY: AMBITION AND PRAGMATISM

December 2014 was marked by two events indicative of the rise of the Indian Navy: first exit to the sea of *INS Arihant*, a nuclear propulsion submarine of local design and manufacturing, and first takeoff with a springboard from the Goa base of a *Tejas* Light Combat Aircraft, a carrier-based fighter-bomber, also of Indian origin. The *Varuna* exercise attended by the aircraft carrier *Charles de Gaulle*, in parallel with the negotiation of the contract for the purchase of 36 *Rafale* fighters, is another signal of this rise in capabilities.

RECLAIMING ITS OCEAN

The ambitions of the Indian Navy have been clearly expressed by New Delhi: The Indian Ocean is the priority sphere of influence of the subcontinent. The Indian islands of Andaman and Nicobar, located in the Strait of Malacca, host the naval command for the Far East. Mauritius has authorized the installation of a naval infrastructure on the island of Agalega. A radar station in Madagascar and defense agreements with Mozambique enable the Indian Navy to patrol the Mozambique Channel. Finally, New Delhi has established defense agreements with Oman, and security agreements with Qatar.

India maintains a peaceful coexistence with the US Navy - especially for the area of Diego Garcia - and the Royal Australian Navy. The situation is very different with Pakistan, historic rival and ally of China, whose attempts to secure logistics fulcrums in the Indian Ocean (Burma, Bangladesh and East Africa) is seen with suspicion.

DIVERSIFIED ACQUISITIONS OF MATERIALS

To counter maritime appetites of the Middle Kingdom, the Indian government has launched ambitious but pragmatic naval and aerospace armaments programs.

For instance, the tropism for the purchase of Russian equipment may still exist but has clearly been decreasing - the disappointments with the operational maintenance of the ten *Kilo 877-E* submarines may explain this caution. This strong desire to diversify suppliers results in significant acquisitions of export materials (*Star* plate radar and *Barak* Israeli missiles, *IF-21 Black Shark* torpedoes and *OTO-Melara* artillery of Italian origin, American *S-70B Seahawk* helicopters, General Electric gas turbines on the latest naval units, French *Scorpene*...).

More recently, the national preference in the design and construction of new units as well as their weapons and equipment has reflected the importance given by New Delhi to the local industry and national independence. There is however a common feature of armaments programs to be highlighted (whether of local origin, licensed or purchased in Russia): the virtually systematic delays. They make it difficult

to accurately estimate the development of the Indian naval power in the next ten years.

AMBITIOUS WEAPONS PROGRAMMES

The great Indian power projects revolve around three programs over the (optimistic) 2020 horizon.

The first one involves the formation of a carrier battle group around the *INS Vikramaditya* and future *INS Vikrant* aircraft carriers, with an escort of destroyers and modern frigates (*Kolkata* and *Shivalik* classes).

The second objective is setting up a submarine force of twenty conventional submarines and three nuclear-powered ballistic missile and attack submarines (SSBN and SSN) of *Advanced Technology Vessel* type including *INS Arihant*. A single SSN is operational today, the *INS Chakra*, leased from Russia since 2012 for ten years. Pragmatism being in order, talks are underway to lease a second unit.

The third program, the most successful, is aimed at creating a modernized naval aviation, with a maritime patrol equipped with *P-8I Poseidon* (India is the second nation after the United States to commission this aircraft), *MIG-29K* carrier-based interceptors, *Tejas* fighter bombers and *Seahawk* helicopters. It is more than likely that the 36 *Rafale* being acquired will be part of this rise in maritime power.

With such weapons programs, India reveals a real ambition to make the Indian Ocean a *Mare Nostrum* partially shared with the United States and Australia but in no case with the Beijing-Islamabad axis.



May 2, 2015, Franco- Indian force gathered around the two aircraft carriers *Charles de Gaulle* and *Vikrant* for the *Varuna* exercise © Marine nationale