

# Approval of GPV 2018-2025 Project Will Determine Future of Aircraft Carrier for Russia's Navy

*Defense-aerospace*

**MOSCOW** - The forthcoming approval of the State Armament Program for 2018-2025 (GPV 2018-2025) is to determine the future of several projects, including the ones intended for Russia's Navy. The expert of the Izvestia newspaper Ilya Kramnik sees into the prospective of the implementation of the most ambitious programs.

Several lofty statements about the building of large-capacity ships for Russia's Navy were made in Summer 2017, first of all, the one by Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the service Viktor Bursuk regarding the plans to deliver two indigenous landing helicopter docks (LHD) before 2025. In July 2017, the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin issued a decree to authorize the basic concepts of Russia's state policy in the naval area through 2030. They set the retaining of the second place in the world in terms of combined combat potential as a top priority for Russia's Navy and, in particular, envision the development of aircraft-carrying ships.

At the MAKS 2017 international aerospace show in July, Deputy Defense Minister Yuri Borisov informed about the probable building of an aircraft carrier armed with short take-off and vertical landing (STOVL) aircraft for Russia's Navy.

Considering the sluggishness of the naval shipbuilding, the range of options for future developments is likely to be a very limited one. Unfortunately, the unrealized ambitious plans to build a new dry dock in Kronstadt and to carry over the manufacturing capacities of the Admiralty Shipyards to the Kotlin Island significantly reduce the space to maneuver.

According to the Izvestia, the implementation of limited programs to upgrade certain shipyards will allow building of LHDs, not a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier. For instance, the Northern Shipyard in Saint Petersburg that is slated to receive a new covered building berth will be able to build ships with a displacement of up to 25,000 t, according to the known project of the enterprise modernization. A wide cooperation of enterprises should be established to build LHD-type super-large ships.

Therefore, the conditions to build an aircraft carrier in Russia will have been provided by no earlier than mid-2020, and the ship is understood to be built by parts. Therefore, Russia's industry will have to follow in the steps of the British shipyards that cooperated the efforts of the whole branch during the building of the Queen Elizabeth-class aircraft carriers.

Regarding the current situation with the shipbuilding capacities and the existing plans to update them, the first Russia's LHD is believed to be laid down no earlier than 2019, while the building of the second ship of the type may start in 2021-2022, if everything goes to plan.

The Izvestia newspaper says that a new generation STOVL aircraft might make its maiden

flight no earlier than 2025-2026. This project is not expected to be of a top priority, as the Naval Aviation and the Aerospace Forces (VKS) have more urgent issues to be solved.

Considering the announcements made by the representatives of the MoD and the known requirements of the service, an LHD of an aircraft carrier design with a standard displacement of 25,000 tonnes and an air wing of 20-25 medium helicopters is believed to be built for the Navy. The ship might get some anti-submarine warfare (ASW) capabilities also. The building of such a surface combatant will provide the experience required to build an aircraft carrier (in the case of the positive decision) and beef up the export potential of the branch, as a number of foreign countries are interested in the acquisition of aircraft carrying ships of this class.

The retaining of Russia's sole aircraft carrier, the 'Admiral Kuznetsov', in service is not challenged by the authorities. However, the financing of its upgrade seems to be not expedient, as it may exceed RUB60-70 billion. Considering the ship's age, such a measure is not practical, as it will extend its service life by 10-15 years only, while a new aircraft carrier can serve not less than 40-50 years.

The most practical solution is to conduct a repair of the 'Admiral Kuznetsov' in order to extend its service life without additional expenses and to finish the development of a new aircraft carrier that will be able to enter the service, when the 'Admiral Kuznetsov' has been phased out.

Regarding the current condition of the indigenous shipbuilding, the dreams to build such large-capacity ships without heavy investments in the branch can be compared with the dreams to implement a space program without a spaceport, Ilya Kramnik, an expert of the Izvestia newspaper, concludes.