

Indian Express Dec 13, 1986

Aircraft Carriers

Sir,

Brig. NB Grant's "Does India need more aircraft carriers"(IE Dec,12) is not totally without a case against acquisition of more aircraft carriers for our Navy. However, his views on the employment of the Navy in general and the aircraft carrier in particular, do not appear to be based on the correct understanding of the concepts of naval warfare.

It must be understood that in naval warfare the concept of defence is different from what it is in land warfare. Due to open flanks at sea and the mobile nature of naval warfare, offensive action, aimed at gaining command of the sea, remains to be the sheet-anchor of all naval strategy – even for a country "wedded to the policy of a defensive role".

Even a defensive role of our Navy would, more often than not, require it to carry the war into the enemy's territorial waters.

For India to gain command of the seas surrounding it is a geographic necessity; and the command of the seas is not possible without command of the air space over them. This is where the aircraft carrier comes in. It would be incorrect to ascribe a negative role to the aircraft carrier based fleet – that of defending itself.

It is not just a mobile airfield protected by 30 odd ships of sorts. It is a striking force as a whole with an inherent defensive system to be able to destroy without being destroyed.

No two countries have similar strategic requirements and just because one needs fewer aircraft carriers, or none at all, does not indicate the requirement of the other. The US and the USSR have their problem of reducing their capacity to over-kill Britain, Japan, Australia and Canada could probably bask under US security, but can we? India certainly needs aircraft carriers. Exactly how many is for the experts to decide.

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