

Times of India April 9, 1978

NAVAL MIGHT

Sir,

Major General (Retd) E Habibullah's conclusion that "strategy and tactics indicate that India has little or no use for a Navy" (Do we need a large Navy? March 26) is to say the least fantastic. One wonders what could be the basis for this conclusion.

His short article could not have accommodated an elaborate analysis of the existence or non existence of a naval threat but one would have still expected him to deal with a subject of such importance in greater depth than he has done. He has hardly touched the fringes of the problem and what is more has indulged in some over-simplifications. This is reminiscent of the pre-1962 era. Must we wait for a debacle at sea to realise the importance of the naval aspect of Indian defence?

Mr. Chari's comments are, as would be expected of the head of the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, well reasoned out. He has acknowledged the existence of the threat at sea, the importance of sea power in general, and the consequent need for the expansion of the Indian Navy. Yet it would appear that he too has not been able to do full justice to the subject in this short article. He has referred to the immediate threat and not the future one for which, in fact, we are to start preparing today. His emphasis on the defensive role of the Navy is also likely to be misunderstood by the layman who may start thinking of defence at sea in terms of defence on land. Few would understand that in view of open flanks at sea and the mobile nature of sea warfare, a defensive strategy at sea implies offensive tactics and that there is definite requirement for sea assertion and sea denial (both forms of sea control) in varying degrees, even if we are to maintain a defensive posture at sea.

What seems to have been completely lost sight of is the role of the Navy in the protection of our trade routes through the seas. With 90 per cent of our trade passing through the seas, our sea-lanes are very vulnerable to an enemy offensive at sea during war and they need to be protected at all costs.

Whether we like it or not, balance of power (in its present day form) must form the basis of our defence policy just as it does for other countries. No doubt balancing of power is a tricky game and could set off an arms race but for ensuring our security there is no other way out. A unilateral renunciation of the concept of balance of power would only expose the country to serious external threats.

One could hardly disagree with Admiral Kohli in his bid for a stronger Navy. Whether we can afford it or not would, by itself, form a separate subject.

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