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Role of Vikrant

Sir,

In his article "Thank God the Vikrant is Safe" Brig NB Grant appears to have ascribed a negative role to the aircraft carrier – that of defending itself. This is not correct. Nor would it be correct to think that the 30 odd warships that accompany the aircraft carrier are there to perform a similar passive role. Indeed the aircraft carrier based fleet is essentially a strike force as a whole and each of its components adds up to its offensive capability. The system of self-protection, which is inherent in the operational functioning of the fleet, also goes to enhance its offensive capability; being able to destroy without being destroyed.

The true objective of any Navy is the establishment of command of the sea by the destruction or neutralisation of the enemy fleet and this first principle of maritime strategy is as valid today as it was during the days of Admiral Mahan who enunciated it. In naval warfare there is no defence as the term is understood in land warfare and the command of the seas remains the directing principle, whether the navy is being employed for furthering imperialistic objectives or for national defence. It is only that while employed in the role of protecting national interests at sea the navy strives to command the sea with the limited purpose of denying such control of the sea to the enemy. India, therefore, needs to command the sea as much as any other country. For this role entailing 'seek and destroy' the Indian Navy can be required to operate far out in the high seas and at times out of range of shore based fighter aircraft. This is where the importance of the aircraft carrier comes even in the present day context. If the Vikrant was not used in the last two wars, it should not automatically follow that there will be no such requirement in the next one also.

With a coastline of about 5,600 km and 95 per cent of our trade being carried on by sea, we are destined to become a major sea power. It is difficult to visualise sea power without an aircraft carrier.

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