

**Indian Express, New Delhi, January 11, 1979**

**The role of the Navy**

Sir,

Your defence correspondent has defined the role of the Navy very correctly ("Role and composition of the Navy" January 2), but all his conclusions with regard to the composition of our naval forces do not appear to be quite correct. It is particularly not correct to ascribe a negative role to the aircraft carrier as your correspondent appears to have done by assuming that the task of the aircraft carrier (and its aircraft on board) is confined to guarding itself. The stupidity of holding on to the aircraft carrier under such circumstances would be quite obvious; but retaining the aircraft-carrier would not appear quite as ridiculous if the positive role, that it is intended to perform, is taken into account.

The entire naval warfare theory is based on the necessity of gaining the command (or control) of the sea. In our case also there is the need for us to control the sea(s), both for the protection of the sea lanes for trade as well as for the protection of our shores (the static protection of the shores being the responsibility of the land forces). However, command and control of the sea cannot be obtained without the command of the air space above it. The aircraft-carrier enables the naval force to maintain this air superiority over its area of operations, even when operating away from its shores.

An interceptor is basically a fighter and the fact that the Harrier is an interceptor does not in any way affect the offensive posture of our aircraft-carrier. In any case one cannot advocate discarding the aircraft carrier on the ground that it is carrying the wrong type of aircraft. One might, however, suggest a change in the aircraft. Once the need for the aircraft carrier has been established, the high cost of maintaining it cannot be put forward as an argument for discarding it. If the sinking of the aircraft carrier during a war is a great blow and our Navy would, consequently, suffer a loss of face, then let us make our naval force strong enough to ensure that it is not sunk. Although little realised in our country, the Navy can play a significant role in national diplomacy. The prestige of the Navy, which is linked with the aircraft carrier is, therefore, of no little importance during peace. If the present aircraft carrier is likely to last for another decade only, then we had better start planning for another one, if it has not been done already.

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