

designs, India must control the strategic choke points in the Indian Ocean if it is to be preeminent in its maritime approaches. In this regard Indian maritime strategists are no different from their Portuguese, Dutch and British predecessors. This is not the nineteenth century, however, and even if India had the inclination to follow in Britain's footsteps it could not approach the jurisdiction the Royal Navy enjoyed over Suez, Simonstown and Singapore. Absolute control of the Indian Ocean is unattainable in contemporary circumstances. The developing mix of the Indian fleet indicates that New Delhi recognises its sea-control limitations and has chosen another option.

A sea-control strategy for a body of water as large as the Indian Ocean would require far more than India's anticipated three-carrier fleet.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, it would require vessels that packed more punch than the light carriers India currently possesses. Both of India's carriers, the *Viraat* (formerly the *Hermes*) and the *Vikrant* (formerly the *Glory*), are transfers from the United Kingdom and have undergone extensive refits in India. They are now configured to carry eight *Sea Harrier* attack aircraft and eight *Sea King* Anti-Submarine Warfare helicopters.<sup>36</sup> This does not suggest that their primary purpose is to spearhead amphibious assaults or to bring great force to bear on distant targets. Besides, India only has one regiment of approximately 1,000 Marines and limited amphibious capability.<sup>37</sup> India's amphibious forces and two light aircraft carriers are adequate for the protection of its major offshore assets, particularly the Nicobar and Andaman islands, but they would not play a significant role in larger-scale

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<sup>35</sup> A third aircraft carrier is to be indigenously built at the Cochin shipyard with French, Soviet and British technical assistance and should be completed by the late 1990s. Since the decision was taken to build this carrier, the Soviet Union has offered to supply India with a Kiev-class aircraft carrier. At the time of writing it is not clear whether India will proceed with domestic construction and end up with four carriers, or if the Soviet offer will result in the abandonment of plans to build an Indian vessel.

<sup>36</sup> Obviously, India will have to acquire many more naval aircraft if it wants to deploy all three carriers simultaneously.

<sup>37</sup> A second Marine regiment is being formed. India's ten amphibious vessels comprise one heavy landing ship (capacity 200 troops, twelve tanks and one helicopter) and nine medium landing ships (capacity 140 troops and six tanks). Source: *The Military Balance --1989-90*. London: IISS, 1989, p. 160.