

1. HOW ARE THE ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR ISLANDS STRATEGICALLY IMPORTANT TO INDIA?

Andaman and Nicobar Islands are treated as extended arms of India and are very important aspects of country's security. Far removed from the mainland of India, raised at a good distance in the Bay of Bengal, lie the 572 islands of Andaman and Nicobar Islands, which form the southeast border. In the north of the archipelago at a distance of only 22 nautical miles lies Myanmar and in the south (Indira Point) at a distance of 99 nautical miles lies Indonesia. The Andaman and Nicobar islands span the East West SLOCs (Sea Lines of Communication) and sit at a very strategic position. The establishment of the tri services Andaman and Nicobar Command in 2001 was the first step towards securing these islands as a bastion against possible attacks by irregular or conventional forces. The archipelago sits strategically to at the entrance of Malacca Strait, the world's busiest shipping route. With increasing presence of China in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), India needs to strengthen its base in the region and for that matter; the strategic capability of Andaman and Nicobar Islands should be strengthened. In the time of crises India needs to resort to blockade of Straits of Malacca, Lombok or Sunda by the Indian Navy, based out of Port Blair, in conjunction with the navies of Indonesia, Vietnam and other ASEAN nations. These islands should be modelled as powerful aircraft bases for defence purposes. Presence of effective radar stations on the islands helps in monitoring the IOR. The Andaman Nicobar islands in the east and Lakshadweep in the West acts as gateways for entry into the resource rich region of the Indian Ocean. The strategic importance of these archipelagos cannot be overemphasized as the Nicobar Island group is just 90 km away from Indonesia archipelago, an important partner in India's Look East Policy.

With a view to establishing a maritime exclusive zone in case of possible conflict with China, India should deploy anti-access and area-denial (A2/AD) on these islands. Increasing terrorist activities, presence of aircraft carrier, or nuclear attack submarines could be countered by strategically developing the Andaman and Nicobar Island. Strengthening defense infrastructure on the island is sure to send a strong message to the global powers that India has leading presence in the IOR.