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**Seema Mehra Parihar**  
Professor, Department of  
Geography; Director  
Himalayan Centre-WCG,  
Kirori Mal College; and DSPH,  
Institute of Eminence  
University of Delhi, Delhi,  
India

**Mohammed Baber Ali**  
Associate Professor  
Department of Geography,  
University of Delhi, Delhi,  
India

**Yuvraj Singh Sikarwar**  
Research Assistant, Kirori Mal  
College, University of Delhi,  
Delhi, India

**Asmit Soni**  
Research Assistant, Kirori Mal  
College, University of Delhi,  
Delhi, India

**Vyom Sharma**  
Research Assistant, Kirori Mal  
College, University of Delhi,  
Delhi, India

**Corresponding Author:**  
**Seema Mehra Parihar**  
Professor, Department of  
Geography; Director  
Himalayan Centre-WCG,  
Kirori Mal College; and DSPH,  
Institute of Eminence  
University of Delhi, Delhi,  
India

## **Anchoring the Indo-Pacific: The strategic imperatives behind India's Great Nicobar development**

**Seema Mehra Parihar, Mohammed Baber Ali, Yuvraj Singh Sikarwar, Asmit Soni and Vyom Sharma**

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### **Abstract**

The Holistic Development of Great Nicobar Island, authorized by NITI Aayog through an initial investment of ₹72,000 crore and subsequently increased to around ₹81,000 crore by 2025, represents the biggest single infrastructure project India has ever committed to a border region. This essay seeks to argue that the project should be understood not as an infrastructure program but rather as India's greatest gamble in terms of geography in the Indo-Pacific that involves the conscious transformation of an island frontier into an ongoing forward operating base towards the east of the Strait of Malacca. The core argument proposed herein is that the geostrategic rationale behind it is well founded, the strategic objective is legitimate, but its success depends on overcoming three outstanding issues that are: i) ecological irreversibility in a tectonically active Zone V environment, ii) the population security risks for the indigenous Shompen and Nicobarese communities, and iii) an unresolved commercial proposition vis-a-vis dominant transshipment ports in Colombo and Singapore. Each of these can corrode the rules-based legitimacy India is trying to claim as the basis of its Indo-Pacific leadership. The paper proceeds through six analytical moves: a material audit of the project, a geographical reading of the Six Degree Channel, an assessment of the China factor, a comparative typology of forward island bases, a scenario-based projection of strategic outcomes, and a structured engagement with counter arguments. The conclusion is qualified support, with four policy recommendations that decouple the strategic-military case from the maximalist commercial case.

**Keywords:** Great Nicobar Project, Indo-Pacific, Strait of Malacca, Maritime Geopolitics, Strategic Geography, Choekpoint Politics, Andaman and Nicobar Command, SAGAR, Shompen, Indigenous Rights, Indian Ocean Region

### **Introduction**

India occupies a unique position in current Indo-Pacific debates. Its mainland is continental, its political identity is land-bordered, and its civilian foreign-policy idiom is reflected by non-alignment. Whereas its economic future, its energy security, and its strategic competition with China all run through the sea and specifically through the eastern approach to the Indian Ocean, where the Andaman and Nicobar Islands extend the country's territorial reach by roughly 1,200 kilometres towards the Strait of Malacca. The Holistic Development of Great Nicobar Island is the first serious attempt in independent India's history to capitalise on that geography.

The project was approved in principle by NITI Aayog in 2021 and received environmental clearance in November 2022. It comprises four components: an International Container Transshipment Port (ICTP) at Galathea Bay, a greenfield international airport with a 3,300-metre runway, a 450 MVA gas and solar power plant, and a township spread across 16,610 hectares. In September 2024 the port was notified as India's thirteenth Major Port. In February 2026 the National Green Tribunal upheld its environmental clearances, citing strategic importance. In mid-2026, the Detailed Project Report will be completed, and tendering of Phase I will commence with an objective to launch first cargo by 2028.

Whether or not India needs an Indo-Pacific strategy is not being debated in this paper; that is settled by official policy documents going back to the SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) doctrine of 2015 and the new MAHASAGAR (Maritime Heads for Active Security and Growth for All in the Region) of 2025. Rather, the debate addressed here is what the geopolitical geography of Great Nicobar implies, and under what circumstances.

The answer, articulated below, is that while geography gives India a prize it did not previously enjoy, this requires conditions not yet answered by the project itself.

This paper will consider different aspects moving through sections. In Literature Review Section, relevant geopolitical theory will be reviewed, focusing on chokepoints and their geographies, and the inverse nature of anti-access logic. In the Project Dynamics Section, the project will be analyzed as material geography. In The Geographical Argument Section, the core thesis regarding the strategic importance of the Six Degree Channel, Malacca chokepoint will be stated and argued. The China Factor Section will consider China's role. In Comparative Typology Section, Great Nicobar will be evaluated against other examples of forward island bases. The Section Strategic Outcomes will project strategic consequences under three scenarios. Counter Arguments Section considers counter cases. The last section i.e. the conclusion provide the policy recommendation on what more progressive can be done.

### Conceptual Framework through Literature Review

The Great Nicobar Project sits at the intersection of three durable traditions in geopolitical theory. Alfred Thayer Mahan's doctrine of command of the seas, articulated in *The Influence of Sea Power upon History* (1890)<sup>[12]</sup>, underwrites the basic logic of investing scarce capital in a remote oceanic platform: maritime power is concentrated at chokepoints, and chokepoints are decisive. Halford Mackinder's heartland thesis, presented in "The Geographical Pivot of History" (1904)<sup>[11]</sup>, privileges Eurasian land power and would, on its own terms, treat the project as marginal. Nicholas Spykman's rimland rejoinder in *America's Strategy in World Politics* (1942) is more relevant, locating the decisive contest along the maritime margin of Eurasia, precisely where Great Nicobar lies (Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History*, 1890; Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History," 1904; Spykman, *America's Strategy in World Politics*, 1942)<sup>[12, 11]</sup>.

K. M. Panikkar grafted Mahan onto Indian historical geography in India and the Indian Ocean (1945)<sup>[17]</sup> with the formulation that whoever controls the Indian Ocean has India at its mercy. Modern Indian strategists including C. Raja Mohan, Brahma Chellaney, Abhijit Singh, and Pradeep Chauhan have updated this formulation for the Indo-Pacific

era. Western analysts including Geoffrey Till, James Holmes, Toshi Yoshihara, and Robert Kaplan have similarly interpreted Indian strategic moves through the lens of contested sea power. The convergence between these literatures is unusual and significant because the same geographical fact reads as strategically central from both Indian and Western analytical standpoints (Panikkar, *India and the Indian Ocean*, 1945; Mohan, *Samudra Manthan*, 2012; Till, *Seapower*, 2018)<sup>[17]</sup>.

Another relatively recent concept imported from elsewhere is A2/AD (Anti-Access/Area Denial), initially conceived for China along the First Island Chain. To understand the Great Nicobar Project is to invert the concept - that is, to see India as building an Indian A2/AD bubble preventing any hostile transit through the Six Degree Channel in a Sino Indian crisis. The inversion is precise: A2/AD need not be a blue-water navy, but only geography, sensors, and long range fires. Geography is supplied by Great Nicobar itself. The institutional framework is the Andaman and Nicobar Command. The sensor architecture will come with the Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) initiative inaugurated by the 2022 Quad meeting in Tokyo. Long range fire capacity includes BrahMos launchers, P-8I maritime patrol aircraft, and MQ-9B Sea Guardian UAVs under procurement.

Two analytical insights follow from the foregoing literature. First, the geographical approach to understanding Great Nicobar is analytically distinct from the defence policy approach in that the former seeks to determine what the territory does, while the latter tries to figure out what the budget purchases. Second, the inversion of A2/AD into a territorial bubble makes the cost efficiency question a different matter, since both A2/AD and chokepoint denial are less expensive alternatives than blue water and sea control.

### The Project Dynamics

The scope of the Holistic Master Plan is 166.10 sq. km., out of which 130.75 sq. km. is forest land. Phase I (2025-2035) has the area of 72.12 sq. km; Phase II (2036-2041) includes 45.27 sq. km.; Phase III (2042-2047) involves 48.71 sq. km. According to the official estimate, the number of trees to be felled is 852,245. The project aims to reclaim around 300 hectares of land from the sea.

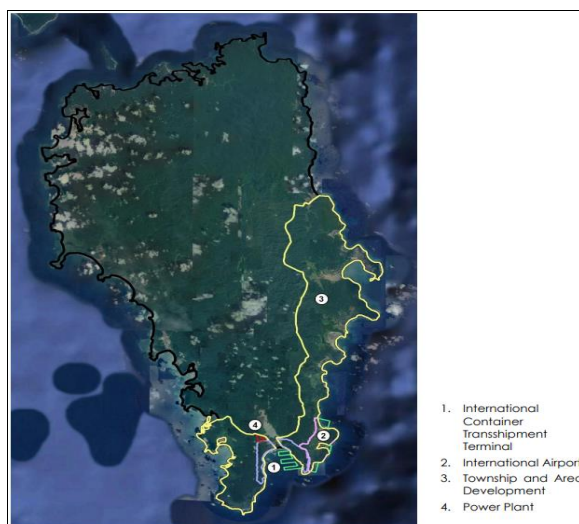


**Fig 1:** The Great Nicobar Island and the Four Development Projects. Source: Holistic Development of Great Nicobar Island at Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Pre-Feasibility Report by AECOM India. March 2021

The costing figures too have shifted locations. As per the 2021 NITI Aayog estimate, the project cost was ₹72,000 crore; the revised figure for 2024-25 would be ₹81,000 crore; some media reports today quote the figure as ₹92,000 crore, after including costs escalations and ancillaries. Of this figure, just the International Container Transshipment Port project costs ₹43,796-44,000 crore. The pre feasibility

study was done by AECOM India.

Table 1 below summarises the project components against their stated strategic and commercial functions. The categorisation matters because, as Section 8 develops, the strategic case for some components is significantly stronger than for others.

**Table 1:** Components of the Great Nicobar Holistic Development Project Sources: NITI Aayog (2021); Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways notification, September 2024; ANIIDCO project filings; PIB Release 2257174; press reportage 2024-2026. TEU = twenty foot equivalent units; PHP = peak hour passengers; MVA = mega volt amperes.

| Component             | Indicative Cost (₹ crore) | Capacity (Ultimate)       | Primary Strategic Function                            | Commercial Function                                   |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| ICTP, Galathea Bay    | 43,796-44,000             | 14.2-16 million TEU       | Naval logistics, dual use berthing, submarine support | Transshipment to capture cargo from Colombo/Singapore |
| International Airport | ≈18,000                   | 3,300 m runway; 4,000 PHP | P-8I, BrahMos armed fighters, transport aircraft      | Tourism gateway; secondary                            |
| Power Plant           | ≈9,000                    | 450 MVA (gas + solar)     | Hardened base load for military assets                | Township and port load                                |
| Township              | ≈10,000                   | ~650,000 residents (peak) | Support population for sustained operations           | Economic activity; demographic anchor                 |

### The Geographical Argument: Command of the Six Degree Channel

The case for Great Nicobar rests on a single map. Indira Point at 6°45'10"N is India's southernmost land. It lies approximately 365 nautical miles (about 675 kilometres) from the western mouth of the Strait of Malacca and roughly 90 nautical miles north of Indonesia's Rondo Island

in Aceh province. The Great Channel (Six Degree Channel) between them is 163-200 kilometres wide and carries the bulk of eastbound trans Malacca shipping. The Andaman and Nicobar Command describes itself as one where more than 94,000 commercial vessels pass through annually, carrying an estimated 40% of international trade between China, South Korea, and Japan.

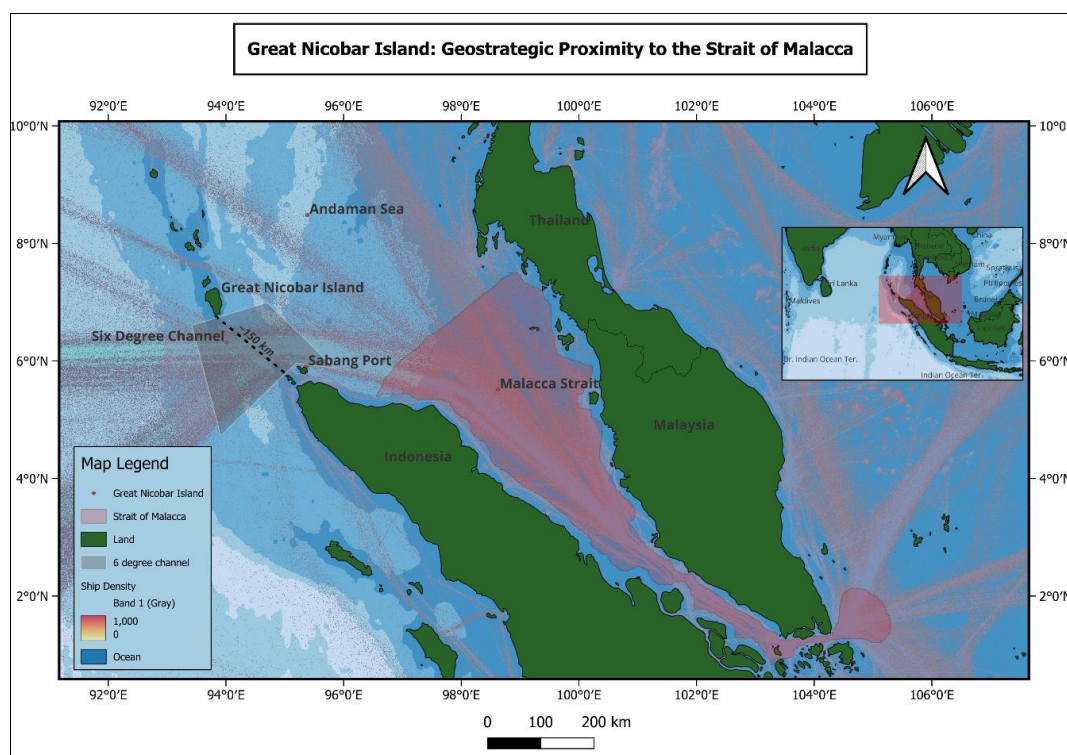


**Fig 2:** Great Nicobar Island and its proximity to the Strait of Malacca and hold over Six Degree Channel, Source: Self-created using QGIS software and data from open source databases

This chokepoint challenge is immense. As per the World Oil Transit Chokepoints report by the U.S. Energy Information Administration in the first half of 2025, about 23.2 million barrels of oil per day passed through the Strait of Malacca, representing 29% of all international oil shipments through the seas and surpassing the Strait of Hormuz at around 20.9 million barrels of oil per day during the same period.

Speaking at an economic work conference in November 2003, President Hu Jintao highlighted the "Malacca Dilemma" of China's energy security, pointing out the ambitions of certain major powers to gain control of the strait. Two decades and multiple pipelines have passed since then, yet even the most optimistic assumptions result in an estimated two thirds of Chinese trade passing through the

Malacca Strait. Pipelines originating in Kazakhstan and Myanmar transport mere fractions of China's daily imports of roughly 6.5 million barrels per day through the strait. The geographical superiority enjoyed by Great Nicobar over

current Indian base infrastructure is presented in Table 2 below. The comparison is intentionally narrow: distance from a sustained operations base to the western mouth of Malacca.

**Table 2:** Distance from Indian Bases to the Western Mouth of the Strait of Malacca Sources: Indian Navy doctrine documents; ANC public statements; author calculations using great circle distances. nm = nautical miles. ISR = intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance. Aircraft reaction window assumes a representative cruise speed of 350 knots for maritime patrol aircraft.

| Base / Location              | Distance (nm) | Aircraft Reaction Window | Operational Significance                                   |
|------------------------------|---------------|--------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| Chennai (mainland)           | ~1,250        | 3-4 hours                | Force projection only; no persistent presence              |
| Visakhapatnam                | ~1,400        | 4-5 hours                | Eastern Naval Command HQ; submarine base                   |
| Port Blair (ANC HQ)          | ~750          | 2-2.5 hours              | Current tri service hub; limited ISR endurance             |
| Campbell Bay / INS Baaz      | ~400          | 1-1.5 hours              | Existing forward airfield; underutilised                   |
| Indira Point (Great Nicobar) | ~365          | <1 hour                  | Permanent ISR; persistent presence over Six Degree Channel |

What is made clear by this table is that the marginal geographical advantage of Great Nicobar relative to Port Blair is a crucial factor, whereas the marginal geographical advantage of Port Blair relative to the Indian mainland is not. Reactions are reduced from several hours to less than one hour. ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance) continuity through the channel becomes a constant factor. This is the practical content of the inversion of A2/AD discussed in Section 2: not the ability to win a sea battle, but the ability to make hostile transit unattractive. Indian strategists have read this geography correctly for some time. Admiral Arun Prakash, the first CINCAN at the Andaman and Nicobar Command, has observed in Civil Society Magazine in 2024 that creating a military stronghold in the Great Nicobar would allow India to dominate the Malacca Strait very conspicuously. Abhijit Singh of the Observer Research Foundation describes the islands as an extensive outpost in the ocean for continental India, granting India a surveillance and maritime interdiction capability. C. Raja Mohan, writing in 2019, was equally explicit: any strategy for regional balance, as China projects its economic and military power into the Indian Ocean, would necessarily involve the military and economic development of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Brahma Chellaney has gone further still, calling the chain control of one of China's greatest maritime vulnerabilities.

### The China Factor: From the String of Pearls to Yuan Wang

The Booz Allen Hamilton report Energy Futures in Asia (2005), prepared for the U.S. Department of Defense, popularised the "string of pearls" thesis: Chinese civilian maritime infrastructure at Gwadar, Hambantota, Kyaukpyu, Chittagong, Djibouti and along the East African littoral as latent military reach. The thesis has been criticised, including by analysts at the Lowy Institute, for overstating the military character of what remain commercial assets. Two patterns are not in dispute. The PLA Navy has sustained anti piracy and forward deployments in the Indian Ocean Region almost continuously since 2008. The Yulin-Longpo complex on Hainan Island, with its underground SSBN pens designed to shelter Jin class (Type 094) ballistic missile submarines and a demagnetisation facility, has become the southern bastion of China's sea based nuclear deterrent and its principal launching pad for Indian Ocean operations.

What is worrisome is presence of Chinese surveillance vessels of the Yuan Wang class that seem to have become recurring tenants of the Indian Ocean. Yuan Wang-5 docked

at Hambantota in August 2022 over Indian protest. Yuan Wang-7 transited near the Sunda Strait into the Bay of Bengal multiple times in 2023-25, including immediately before Indian missile tests. In multiple literatures it was acknowledged that Chinese vessels engaging in military work in the Indian Ocean are present here.

The Coco Islands controversy, dormant since 2005 dismissal of the original SIGINT (Signals Intelligence) base claim, was revived in March 2023 when Chatham House analyst John Pollock published satellite imagery showing runway extension, two new hangars and a new causeway on Great Coco Island, only 55 kilometres north of India's Andaman tip. The intelligence picture remains contested. Andrew Selth at the Lowy Institute has consistently cautioned that there is no sign of any significant intelligence gathering facilities, let alone anything that might suggest a permanent Chinese presence. Bloomberg reported in April 2023 that Indian officials had shared satellite imagery with Myanmar that they read as a Chinese assisted listening post. The very existence of disagreement among serious analysts constitutes a strategic data point. In terms of Indian planning, the bottom line is clear: The eastern Indian Ocean is no longer a strategic backwater but Great Nicobar provides the balance to the imperatives of geographical region.

### Comparative Typology: Forward Island Bases

Great Nicobar must be analyzed within a typology of forward island bases. The most comparable example from the perspective of geographical necessity would be that of Diego Garcia, the shared British American base in the Chagos Islands. Both have the same purpose, acting as platforms for securing regional sea lines of communication from deep ocean positions. However, their histories are different; furthermore, in terms of outcomes of legitimacy, they continue to diverge. In October 2024, the United Kingdom decided to relinquish sovereignty to Mauritius in respect of the Chagos Archipelago and lease the area containing Diego Garcia for 99 years. This decision was made on the grounds that the alternative was either abandoning the base or breaking international law. The Diego Garcia trajectory shows that legitimacy costs eventually arrive, and that they impose terms decades later. The Great Nicobar project is, in a sense, a mirror dilemma: India holds uncontested sovereignty, but is removing protections from indigenous reserves to make way for the base.

Guam is the tactical vulnerability case. As a forward American island, its concentration of high value

infrastructure has made it central to US-China missile deterrence calculations, and the same logic will apply to Great Nicobar. Djibouti is the multi base case: French, American (Camp Lemonnier), Japanese and Chinese installations coexist on a single Horn of Africa territory because no single host can monopolise the geography.

Hainan, as discussed, is China’s SSBN bastion. Singapore’s Changi Naval Base is the access without base model, formalised through the 1990 US-Singapore Memorandum of Understanding and its later expansions. Table 3 sets out the typology.

**Table 3:** Comparative Typology of Forward Island Bases Sources: USNI; IISS Military Balance 2024-25; UK FCDO statement, October 2024; Lowy Institute commentary; author synthesis. IOR = Indian Ocean Region. SSBN = nuclear powered ballistic missile submarine.

| Base                     | Operator                            | Strategic Function                           | Legitimacy Status                      | Lesson for Great Nicobar                         |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Diego Garcia             | UK / US                             | Central IOR sea control                      | Contested (2024 sovereignty return)    | Legitimacy costs arrive late and impose terms    |
| Guam                     | United States                       | Pacific force projection                     | Uncontested sovereignty                | Concentrated assets create missile vulnerability |
| Djibouti                 | Multiple (US, France, China, Japan) | Bab-el-Mandeb access                         | Sovereign host; multi tenant           | Geography compels shared access                  |
| Hainan (Yulin)           | PRC                                 | SSBN bastion; IOR projection                 | Uncontested                            | Naval only model; minimal civilian load          |
| Changi (Singapore)       | Singapore (US access)               | Malacca eastern approach                     | Sovereign                              | Access without base reduces political cost       |
| Great Nicobar (proposed) | India                               | Malacca western approach; Six Degree Channel | Sovereign; indigenous rights contested | —                                                |

An adjacent geographical asset deserves separate mention. In May 2018 Indonesia’s then Coordinating Minister for Maritime Affairs Luhut Pandjaitan offered India economic and military access to the deepwater port at Sabang on Pulau Weh, only 90 nautical miles south of Indira Point. The port has 40 meter depth and can accommodate all kinds of ships, even submarines. Along with Great Nicobar, Sabang makes a perfect match as a possible end point on either side of the Six Degree Channel. The only condition is that the readiness of Jakarta is uncertain since Indonesia’s policies of playing safe with Beijing and New Delhi are uncertain.

Strategic Outcomes: A Scenario Projection

There is no fixed value for the strategic utility of Great Nicobar; rather, it is dependent upon decisions in execution, reactions from competitors, and the cost incurred to absorb legitimacy. The three scenarios presented in table 4 below span fifteen years. For this analysis, the comparative historical methodology is applied based on the history of Diego Garcia between 1965 and 2024, the development of Yulin, and the operations of the Andaman and Nicobar Command from 2001 until 2024.

**Table 4:** Strategic Outcome Scenarios for the Great Nicobar Project, 2026-2040. Sources: NITI Aayog; ANIIDCO; comparative case data from IISS, Lowy Institute, USNI; author synthesis. ISR = intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance. ANC = Andaman and Nicobar Command. Outlay figures are indicative.

| Dimension                          | Scenario A: Strategic Lean                                                     | Scenario B: Mixed (Official Plan)                                        | Scenario C: Maximalist                                                |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Description                        | INS Baaz expansion plus hardened ANC infrastructure; no ICTP; township minimal | Current plan: ICTP + airport + power + 650k township across three phases | Accelerated build; Sabang integration; co investment by Quad partners |
| Capital Outlay                     | ₹15,000-20,000 crore                                                           | ₹81,000                                                                  | ₹1,10,000+ crore                                                      |
| Strategic Yield (ISR over Malacca) | High (persistent air ISR achieved)                                             | High (ISR plus naval surge berths)                                       | High (joint Quad ISR node)                                            |
| Commercial Yield                   | Negligible                                                                     | Uncertain; depends on feeder networks                                    | Higher if Singapore-Colombo cargo is contested successfully           |
| Ecological Cost                    | Low to moderate (≈20 sq. km. cleared)                                          | High (130 sq. km. cleared; turtles displaced)                            | Very high                                                             |
| Indigenous Risk (Shompen)          | Containable                                                                    | Severe; international genocide warnings active                           | Catastrophic; reputational rupture                                    |
| Quad Reception                     | Quiet support                                                                  | Cautious; legitimacy debates likely                                      | Active partnership                                                    |
| Legitimacy Net Effect              | Positive or neutral                                                            | Negative on current trajectory                                           | Sharply negative without indigenous safeguards                        |

The fascinating part about this case is that the strategic lean approach manages to garner almost all of the geographic gain for just a quarter of the cost and much less in terms of ecological and reputation losses. The maximalist approach, meanwhile, garners its increased strategic gains mainly by way of Quad formation rather than further capabilities development in India. Finally, the officially mixed scenario seems to be the least tenable on current analysis because it takes on the cost of legitimacy but not its reward.

Counter Arguments and Their Limits

There are three types of arguments that need to be seriously considered. Firstly, there is economic viability. It was claimed by the government officials that India loses nearly \$200 to \$220 million each year due to foreign transshipment facilities and the Galathea Bay, having 20 metres deep natural draft and situated at a distance of 40 nautical miles away from the East-West shipping lane, will compensate for this loss. According to data provided by Ministry of Ports,

around 75 percent of India's transshipments go through overseas facilities, where Colombo, Singapore, and Klang have accounted for more than 85 percent of the transshipments with 45 percent coming via Colombo port alone. Rear Admiral Sudhir Pillai (retired), former Chief of Staff of Andaman and Nicobar Command, has highlighted that in the absence of joint command structures, a chokepoint concept, and a strategy document defining the purpose of the Great Nicobar project, the project would be akin to a platform without a theory, according to him.

Furthermore, there is a competing port issue. For instance, Vadnavan, which is situated in Maharashtra, with a capacity of 23.2 million TEU worth ₹76,220 crore, got approved at the same time as Galathea Bay. Additionally, the first deep water transshipment hub in the country, Vizhinjam in Kerala, operated by Adani Ports, is operational. However, the assertion regarding feeder networks has not been validated independently.

A second objection to the plan is that of vulnerability. An island base that lies in Zone V and which is located in the seismically active Sunda subduction zone is twice vulnerable, both to natural calamities and to enemy fire attacks. The Indira Point receded by around 4.25 metres following the massive Sumatra-Andaman earthquake of 26 December 2004. Even the lighthouse sustained damage and the coastline underwent modification. There is also the Guam type vulnerability of being exposed to missile attack due to concentration of vital facilities in one location.

Third and Ethically Most Important Counter Argument: Ecological and Indigenous Harm

As noted in the Environmental Impact Assessment carried out by Vimta Labs and AECOM India, there will be diversion of 130 square kilometers of forests, 852,245 felled trees, 300 hectares reclaimed from the sea, and harm to the giant leatherback turtle (Galathea Bay contains 775 out of 1068 nests found in the Nicobar archipelago according to IISc ecologist Kartik Shanker), Nicobar megapode, saltwater crocodiles, and Nicobar long tailed macaque. These species face pre existing harms because the Galathea Bay Wildlife Sanctuary has been de notified as recently as January 2021, the eco sensitive zone of Galathea National Park scaled down, the CRZ classification modified, and Shompen reserves redefined.

The indigenous dimension is decisive. Selected literature suggests that the Shompen, a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group of an estimated 200-400 people may be impacted. The National Green Tribunal cleared the project in February 2026 citing strategic importance.

### Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The thesis put forward here can surely be defended with qualifications. The case of Great Nicobar stands out as being that most significant geographical gamble India has made within the Indo-Pacific region in the sense that the geographical element is unique and the strategic objective is tangible. There is nothing west of Singapore in the Indian holdings that can give India an opportunity similar to the one Indira Point will offer when completely developed.

Similarly, the other half of the thesis is equally true, if not truer than stated in the official literature. India's Indo-Pacific narrative is premised on a world of freedom, openness, inclusiveness, and rule of law. This narrative is clearly visible in the conversations present in the verbal and non-verbal communications. The strategic lean scenario

described in Table 4 extracts the greater part of the reward without incurring any of the associated costs. The official mixed scenario is the weakest of the three scenarios.

The following are four proposed stages. In the first place, separate the military strategic dimension from the commercial port maximalist position. The Phase One scope should be limited. Second, make the Shompen conditionality a strict requirement, rather than a mitigation measure. Ensure that a "do not contact" policy is codified through the Forest Rights Act and PVTGs, with an independent oversight panel comprising tribal rights experts. Thirdly, negotiation should be made with Quad and ASEAN partners on using the proposed facility as a shared maritime domain awareness platform, not an Indian unilaterally used base. The Sabang-Aceh-Andaman connection can be institutionalized. Fourthly, mandate independent site specific seismic and tsunami risk assessment by the National Centre for Seismology and international subduction zone experts be done. But surely, the criteria for triggering if there is any earthquake activity in the Andaman Sea beyond certain level for a particular year, then it can be considered for Phase II.

Each of these suggestions involves a quantifiable trigger. The idea behind this is to transform a risky project into an opportunity that retains its strategic potential while bounding its ethical and ecological cost. Geography has gifted India the strategic advantage and most plausibly India will encash it in without losing its legitimacy.

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