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## EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

# Hormuz Is Not Malacca: Why India Cannot Copy Iran's Chokepoint Playbook

 INDIAN EXPRESS

10 July 2026 ·

SECURITY &amp; DEFENCE

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CURATED &amp; WRITTEN BY

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# Hormuz Is Not Malacca: Why India Cannot Copy Iran's Chokepoint Playbook

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## THE LIFT LINE

A **chokepoint** (<https://ujyari.com/vocab/chokepoint/>) is only leverage if you can close it without closing yourself, and that is precisely why India's position near Malacca is not a mirror image of Iran's grip on Hormuz.

## WHY THIS EDITORIAL MATTERS FOR YOUR EXAM

When West Asia flares and the Strait of Hormuz (<https://ujyari.com/terms/strait-of-hormuz/>) dominates headlines, a tempting parallel surfaces: if Iran can threaten the world's oil artery, surely India, sitting astride the approaches to the Strait of Malacca through the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, holds a similar card against China. A former Navy Chief's caution against this facile equation is a masterclass in maritime strategy, and it maps directly onto GS2 international relations and GS3 internal and maritime security.

**GS Paper 2:** India and its neighbourhood, **bilateral** (<https://ujyari.com/vocab/bilateral/>) and regional groupings affecting India's interests, the Indian Ocean Region.

**GS Paper 3:** security challenges in the maritime domain, the role of the armed forces, sea lines of communication.

For **Prelims**, hold the specifics: the Strait of Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea; the Strait of Malacca links the Indian Ocean to the South China Sea; the Andaman and Nicobar Command is India's only unified tri-service theatre command; and SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region), now articulated as MAHASAGAR, frames India's Indian Ocean outlook. For **Mains**, distinguish sea denial from sea control and argue why geography alone does not confer strategic **leverage** (<https://ujyari.com/vocab/leverage/>).

## BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

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The Strait of Hormuz is the narrow gate through which roughly a fifth of the world's traded oil passes. Iran, sitting along its northern shore, has periodically threatened to disrupt traffic there, and this threat gives Tehran outsized bargaining power in any West Asian crisis. Observers watching China's dependence on imported energy and its long sea lines of communication through the Strait of Malacca have asked whether India, whose Andaman and Nicobar Islands lie near Malacca's western approaches, enjoys a comparable ability to squeeze Beijing. The so-called "Malacca dilemma" is a real Chinese anxiety, and it feeds the temptation to see India as holding a decisive lever.

The former Navy Chief's argument is that this parallel is seductive but misleading. The two straits differ in geography, in the legal regime that governs them, and above all in what closing them would cost the country that tried.

## THE CORE ARGUMENT / ISSUE

### The straits are not alike

Hormuz is genuinely narrow, with shipping lanes only a few kilometres wide, and Iran can range much of it from its own coast. Malacca is longer, its western approaches are broad, and alternative routes exist through the Sunda and Lombok straits, which China can use at some added cost. A blockade at Malacca is therefore far harder to make watertight than a threat at Hormuz.

### Sea denial is not sea control

To threaten a strait you need only sea denial, the ability to make an adversary's passage dangerous. To actually close a busy international waterway and hold it closed, you need sea control, sustained dominance against a determined navy. India can contribute to denial in the eastern Indian Ocean; imposing durable control over Malacca against the People's Liberation Army Navy is a far larger undertaking.

### A blockade cuts both ways

Malacca carries not only Chinese cargo but a vast share of global and Indian trade. Choking it in peacetime would be an act of war against the whole trading world, not a targeted squeeze on one rival, and it would damage India's own commerce and standing.

| DIMENSION                   | HORMUZ (IRAN)              | MALACCA (INDIA)                     |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Width and geography         | Very narrow, coast-hugging | Long, broad western approaches      |
| Alternatives for the target | Few                        | Sunda, Lombok straits available     |
| Leverage type required      | Sea denial suffices        | Needs sustained sea control         |
| Collateral cost of closure  | Regional, oil-focused      | Global trade, including India's own |

## HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (ANALYTICAL FRAME)

Separate capability from geography, and leverage from the willingness to use it. Owning territory near a chokepoint is a geographic fact; converting it into strategic leverage requires the naval capability to enforce a threat and the political room to bear the costs of using it. The transferable rule: maritime leverage is credible only when the threat is enforceable, proportionate and less costly to the wielder than to the target. India's realistic role near Malacca is **deterrence** (<https://ujiyari.com/terms/deterrence/>) and **presence**, through the Andaman and Nicobar Command and Indian Ocean partnerships, not the fantasy of a switch that turns off China's trade.

## THE DIAGRAM IN WORDS

Hormuz analogy tempts India -> "hold Malacca against China" -> reality check: broad strait + alternate routes + need for sea control not just denial + blockade harms India too -> conclusion: leverage is not automatic -> realistic path: A&N Command deterrence + IOR partnerships + SAGAR/MAHASAGAR presence + capability building

## WAY FORWARD

- 1 Invest in the Andaman and Nicobar Command.** Strengthen India's only tri-service theatre command with surveillance, logistics and reach so that presence in the eastern Indian Ocean is credible rather than symbolic.
- 2 Build capability for sea denial, plan for sea control.** Prioritise submarines, maritime domain awareness and long-range strike, while recognising that sustained control of a strait is a much larger goal.
- 3 Anchor strategy in partnerships.** Deepen cooperation under the Quad, with regional navies and littoral states, so that any pressure on sea lines is shared and legitimate, not **unilateral** (<https://ujiyari.com/vocab/unilateral/>).
- 4 Lead on the SAGAR/MAHASAGAR vision.** Frame India as the net security provider and rule-of-law champion in the Indian Ocean Region, which is more durable leverage than the threat of a blockade.

## PYO LINKAGE AND PRACTICE

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UPSC has repeatedly asked about the Indian Ocean Region, maritime security, sea lines of communication and India's role as a net security provider. This editorial connects those themes to a live 2026 strategic debate.

**Practice question:** “Geographic proximity to a maritime chokepoint does not by itself confer strategic leverage.” Critically examine with reference to India's position near the Strait of Malacca. (250 words, 15 marks)

**Sources:** *The Indian Express* (<https://indianexpress.com/section/opinion/editorials/>)

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