



South East Asia in India's Foreign Policy:Determining Factors

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Abstract: According to Hill, foreign policy is the hinge of domestic politics and international politics, that is, foreign policies serve as an intersection point of domestic politics and international politics. Hence both domestic and international factors are significant in foreign policy consideration of a state. The main concern of this paper is to provide a theoretical understanding of the factors determining India's foreign policy towards Southeast Asia taking into account a study of various domestic and international factors that has its roots in the experiences of the pre- and post-independence years and the look east policy. Thus, in this article we observe some major internal and external factors that remain significant to India's relationship with Southeast Asia and combine together to contribute to country's foreign policy towards Southeast Asia.

Keywords: India's foreign policy, Southeast Asia, Southeast Asia in India's foreign policy, internal and external factors, domestic and international determinants

Introduction

India's relationship with the region of Southeast Asia is ancient and deep. There are plenty of evidence of dynamic and extensive interactions between India and its eastern neighbours well documented. Archaeological excavations are also a testimony of intense interactions and communications between the two regions in the ancient past. George Coedes, the unchallenged dean of Southeast Asian historical studies has observed commercial rationale to be the principal impetus behind India's interaction with the region. However, more specifically obtaining gold appears to have played a significant role in the commercial expansion of Indians in Southeast Asia.¹ Besides, another most important reason for India's contact with the region was the geographical location of the Malay Peninsula and of the Sunda Islands or the narrow Straits of Malacca. It was such that it made them a necessary port of call for sailors going from the West or India to China and vice versa. Therefore, it is observed that primarily commerce became a major reason for India's interaction and expansion in the Far East, which, eventually resulted in deep Indian influences in the region. Several other factors including social, civilizational, cultural, political and security issues have upheld and advanced India's association with Southeast Asia region from ancient history to present. Nevertheless, peaceful co-existence and fascinating interaction between people of both the lands have played an active role in upholding and determining this relation from ancient history till present.

¹ For details see Bennett, Anna T. N. (2009), Gold in early Southeast Asia. *ArchéoSciences*. 33. pp. 99-107. 10.4000/archeosciences.2072.



In the modern-day, South-East Asia for decades i.e., throughout the Cold War period has been the storm centre of infuriated struggles between big powers as well as of intra-regional rivalries. There is, perhaps, no major power in the world that neglects the region in its foreign policy calculations. Similarly, it occupied an eminent position in India's policy formulations. In the post-cold war period, India's relationship with Southeast Asia, an immensely resourceful and flourishing region was bolstered by India's 'Look East' policy adopted by Prime Minister P. V. Narsimha Rao, in the Asia it particularly aimed at enhancing political and economic engagements with early nineties. Thus, recognizing the growth and significance of the region of Southeast the region which resulted in an enhanced relation than ever before. While, in the recent past, agreeing the long-term strategic significance of the region in India's foreign policy formulations, this look east policy has said to be grown-up and morphed into India's 'Act East' Policy under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, which, is a substantial manifestation of a more focused foreign policy approach towards Southeast Asia in the twenty first century and aims at more proactive engagement with the region to serve its global goals and interests. Therefore, we shall now investigate those factors that make and shape the foreign policy formulation and implementation of India's Southeast Asia policy.

Geographical proximity and Geo-strategic Location

The geography or geopolitical location of a state is one of the unrefuted factors that determine a country's foreign policy. In Amer Rizwan's dictum, "it matters where on the globe a country is located. It matters whether the country has natural frontiers: that is whether it is protected by oceans, high mountains, or desserts. It matters who one's neighbours are and whether a given country is territorially large, populous, affluent and well-governed." Therefore, we observe that, India's strategic location at the centre of the Great Asian Arc stretching from Aden to Tokyo and covering a large part of the Indian Ocean is of utmost significance. And it majorly influences the global powers to programme India into their respective global strategies. Since all the major sea and air routes of the world pass through India Ocean. India and the Indian Ocean are an indispensable link in the world trade and commercial intercourse. The Indian Ocean acts as key connecting link between the geographical areas of West Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia and the Far East. Hence, the geography of India is a major factor influencing India's relation with the Southeast Asia. Jawaharlal Nehru observing the significant strategic position of India in the world map has asserted that no country of the world could ignore India, he asserted.

*"Look at the map. If you have to consider any question affecting the Middle East, India inevitably comes into the picture. If you have to consider any question concerning South-East Asia, you cannot do so without India. Same is the case with the Far-East. While the Middle East may not be directly connected with South-East Asia, both are connected with India. Even, if you think in terms of regional organizations in India. You have to keep in touch with the other regions."*²

² Nehru, Jawaharlal; (Delhi, 1961): *India's Foreign Policy- Selected speeches 1946- 1961*. Ministry of information and Broadcasting, Government of India: Publications Division. Quoted from Malik, Farooq Ahmad; *Politics of Foreign Policy in India*, International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention, Volume 3 Issue 6, June 2014, pp. 22-25



Thus, India is the gateway to South-East Asia. India's security, strategy and vital interests are closely tied with the future of the region and vice versa. Besides, India's geographical proximity with Southeast Asia has resulted in the spread of Indian cultural influence in Southeast Asia which has further influenced India's relationship with Southeast Asia. India's location in the Indian Ocean, littoral along with most of the South-East Asian countries as well as boarder linkages with Myanmar, her proximity to them, make it an imperative that Southeast Asia should occupy a significant position in India's foreign policy formulations.³

Historically, the events of the Second World War, especially, the Japanese sweep up through the continental and mainland Southeast Asia within a surprisingly short span of time, brought cognizance to the exposed and vulnerable eastern flank and the seaward approaches of the subcontinent. Hence, the Indian nationalist elites or the prospective strategist and policymakers of India came to realize the strategic importance of Southeast Asia to the country even before the dawn of independence. The war also brought to light, the significance of the Indian Ocean in defence of the Indian peninsula and increased the Indian awareness of its maritime strategy. Better understood by the fact that, India's island territories in the Bay of Bengal lay barely ninety miles apart from the Straits of Malacca, and this enhanced the strategic significance of Southeast Asia to India. K.M. Panikkar, a pioneer of modern India's strategic thinking writes, *'The Gulf of Malacca is like the mouth of a crocodile, the Peninsula of Malaya being the upper and the jutting end of Sumatra being the lower jaw.'*⁴ Consequently, access to the Gulf is guarded by the Nicobars and the tapered end is subjugated by the island of Singapore eventually. Hence, the closeness and proximity of India to Southeast Asia and India's location littoral along with the countries of the region makes it obvious and indisputable that Southeast Asia occupies a significant position in India's foreign policy formulations.

Shared History and Cultural Contacts

The external affairs of a state are to a considerable extent the legacy of its history and cultural heritage. History and culture not only impact and shape the foreign policy of a nation-state in particular but also the international relations in general. The approach of a nation to the foreign problems is determined by its traditional values and beliefs which have emerged over the periods of years. Similarly, historical experiences, shared culture and traditions of a state, exert influence on the foreign policy decision making towards a particular state. In general, it can be observed that states with unified culture and common history find it easier to formulate effective and consistent foreign policy. In this context, we observe India's cultural relations with Southeast Asia which are one of the most fascinating fields of history. The initial contact between the two regions dates back to prehistoric times.

³ Ghosh, Lipi. (2007); 'Changing Perspectives & Dynamics of India's Relations with Southeast Asia: A Study of Indo-ASEAN Political Partnership' in B.C Upreti edited – *Regional Cooperation in South Asia: Emerging Dimensions and Issues*, (New Delhi: Sumit Enterprises), pp. 212

⁴K.M. Panikkar, *India and the Indian Ocean: An Essay on the Influence of Sea Power on Indian History*, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1945, 21. A second edition of this book was published in 1961 and an Indian reprint was issued in 1971. (This is a pioneering and probably the most significant study by an Indian strategic thinker on the importance of India's maritime environment for independent India's security.)



However, early Indian migration is subject to debate among scholars. But there is a general agreement that it took place both by land and sea routes. This interaction has left an indelible impression on almost every aspect of life in several countries of the region. Indian philosophy, religion, music, literature, art and architecture have left dynamic impact on many countries of South East Asia.⁵ India is the birthplace of Buddhism, which is practiced by a large number of people in mainland South East Asia and Indian merchants and traders from Gujarat are known to have brought Islam to the South East Asian Coasts during their trading visits.⁶ It would not be an exaggeration to say that this intercourse has been a vital factor in shaping the history of this area. This close historical and cultural contact between India and Southeast Asia acts as a catalyst in improving trade, economic, politico-security relations of not only the past but also the present.

At present, the cultural cooperation between India and the countries of South East Asia has seen improvement with a large number of programmes to boost People-to-People Interaction with ASEAN, such as inviting ASEAN students to India each year for the Students Exchange Programme, Special Training Course for ASEAN diplomats, Exchange of Parliamentarians, Participation of ASEAN students in the National Children's Science Congress, ASEAN-India Network of Think Tanks, ASEAN-India Eminent Persons Lecture Series, etc. In order to revive the historical-cultural relations, Singapore has proposed reviving Nalanda University in Bihar and India is engaged in developing road and rail transport systems in the CLMV countries facilitating greater movements of people from the region as tourists or as pilgrims visiting religious places in India such as Sanchi, Sarnath, Bodhgaya, and Nalanda.⁷ Moreover, the cultural contacts have not only impressively resulted in augmented economic relations but have built on the shared values of the past, which have further impacted the risk-taking, innovation, entrepreneurship, and trade relations positively.

Political Tradition and National Philosophy

The political tradition of any country is an important determinant of its foreign policy calculations. India is a democratic country and established institutions of democratic political structure such as an elected Parliament, political parties and a free press make their due impact on its foreign policy. India's idealist approach to politics, power, and internationalism, commitment to world peace, anti-colonialism, opposition to racism, commitment to democracy, secularism and peaceful Co-existence, etc. are certain philosophical values that emerged during the freedom movement. All these factors determine the political tradition of the country and have deeply influenced India's relation with the neighbour in the Southeast.

In this context, Southeast Asia remains significant to India's foreign policy. Reason being, the first generation of India's post-independence leaders, believed that India's goal of preserving its autonomy of action in world affairs could only be achieved in context of

⁵ Madhangopal, R.; '*India and ASEAN: Strengthening Cultural and Academic Cooperation*' in *India and ASEAN Growing Partnership for the 21st Century* (eds.) K S Nathan, Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations, Kualalampur (Malaysia), 2000, pp. 98-99.

⁶ Mishra, Patit Paban; "India-Southeast Asia Relations: An Overview," South Dakota State University, 2001.

⁷ Sharma, Rouble; '*India and ASEAN in the 21st Century*', *Third Concept*, May 2012.



decolonization in rest of Asia and in cooperation with independent governments in the continent. Therefore, the anti-colonial struggles in Southeast Asia were seen as indivisible from India's struggle for independence from colonial subjugation. Thus, the Indian nationalist elites or the prospective strategist and policymakers of India foreseeing the future of India as indivisible from the future of Asia, and particularly of Southeast Asia organized an Asian Relations' Conference in March 1947 i.e., even before independence with the purpose of uniting the states in Asia against the cold war. In post-independence years this was followed by another high-profile conference on Indonesia which was held in January 1949 with the purpose of expressing solidarity with the Indonesian nationalist leadership and pressurizing the Dutch government and its supporters to accelerate the process of Indonesian independence. However, similar attitude was not adopted towards the Vietnamese freedom struggle against the French due to the Communist-dominated character of the Vietnamese national movement. Because India's leadership had distaste for native Communists, and it was suspicious of the Vietnam being susceptible to becoming a member of either of the Cold War blocs. Simultaneously, surfacing of a Communist government in China, sharing borders with Vietnam, added to, the Indian reservations regarding the Vietnamese government, who were viewed as Chinese Communists' natural and logical allies in South East Asia at that time.⁸ Though, for South East Asian countries anti-imperialism and anti-colonial remained a basic tenet of the public opinion in most places, mainly because they were afraid of the possibility of the coming back of the imperialist.⁹ But, members of the ASEAN community also wanted to co-exist peacefully with all communist states to their North. Whatever, their idiosyncrasies the ASEAN nations are committed to peaceful existence and world peace and India's commitment to non-communism and non-alignment makes her a natural friend of the countries of ASEAN.¹⁰ Later, came the Bandung conference that led to the establishment of ASEAN regional community centre around the principles building a non-aligned Asian community. Thus, the Bandung Conference and the Asian Relations Conference were key points in the efforts by the newly emerging Asian nations to create a pan-Asian identity and a place in the international community. In this there was a convergence of interests between India and Southeast Asia. Freedom from foreign domination and nonalignment were among the ideals that were held by Asian nationalists during the 1960s. However, these ideals started fading away as Southeast Asian states began developing their own foreign policies based on their national interests.

⁸Sardesai, D.R. (1968); *Indian Foreign Policy in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, 1947–1964*, (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles), p. 15.

⁹ Ghosh, Lipi (2007); 'Changing Perspectives & Dynamics of India's Relations with Southeast Asia: A Study of Indo-ASEAN Political Partnership' in B.C Upreti edited – *Regional Cooperation in South Asia: Emerging Dimensions and Issues*, (New Delhi: Sumit Enterprises), pp. 212

¹⁰The Tribune. (1978, November 15). Quoted from Ghosh, Lipi; 'Changing Perspectives and Dynamics of India's Relations with Southeast Asia: A Study of Indo-ASEAN Political Partnership' in B.C Upreti (ed.) *Regional Cooperation in South Asia: Emerging Dimensions and Issues*.



Political Leadership and Personality

Leadership in general or the personality of a leader in particular plays a profound role in foreign policy formulation. The role of personality in foreign policy encompasses cognitive processes and assumes that decision making is the result of individual ‘human agency;’ that is, ultimately, it is ‘individuals’ who make decisions, not the ‘states.’ Thus, personality factor can be especially important in adding to our understanding of foreign policy behaviour. For example, Prime Minister Mr. PV Narsimha Rao along with Finance Minister and Economist Mr. Manmohan Singh who initiated the rejuvenation in relation with Southeast Asia with the launch of his Look East policy was visionary to recognize the importance of engaging with a vibrant economy. Since, India was a very fragile economy heavily dependent on Soviet Union at that moment and the fall of Soviet bloc led her to facing an economic crisis. Indian economy was in a transition phase propelled on looking at alternatives focusing more on boosting its economy. The leadership realising the need of the hour and the immense scope for growth in the region, as Japan and China had already become major economic players in the region turned to its neighbourhood in the East for advancing economic collaboration. Thus, decision making was the result of individual capacity which transformed the legacy of foreign policy. Although, initial cooperation was both political and economic but however only economic cooperation was focused upon vastly. This continued later as it brought

Later, a significant transformation in India’s relationship with Southeast was marked by a popular political leader and Prime Minister Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Mr. Vajpayee and his government foreign policy gave impetus to boost the ‘neighbourhood first’ and ‘friendly neighbourhood’ policy keeping in mind the strategic significance and interests of upholding and maintaining a healthy relationship with the neighbouring countries. Consequently, he went ahead to sign the Summit Level partnership agreement with the ASEAN community in the year 2002. Since then, Summit level meetings are held annually to deliberate on development and cooperation initiatives across sectors between India and ASEAN every year. Moreover, these annual Summits have been praised by world leaders throughout on account of their success and ability to produce results at a global level. Another important mention in this context, is the contemporary Indian Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi and his government, who plan to enhance and augment the depth and quality of the engagement achieved in its Look East Policy through a more action-oriented ‘Act East’ strategy for Southeast Asia. This policy builds further on the neighbourhood first policy and asserts Southeast Asia a central place in India’s formally enunciated Act East Policy. As well as it also recognizes the strategic significance of Southeast in India’s policy towards the Asia Pacific as a whole, which also serves her long-term goals and global interests. It focuses on developing a Quad – India, USA, Japan and Australia or upgrading the strategic partnership with other nations in the region to counter the dominance of China. Greater focus is also on advancing infrastructure development and defence cooperation. Thus, manifesting in an extensive accelerated and comprehensive engagement between these two growth poles of Asia. Here, Act East policy has a greater strategic and political angle to the cooperation through focusing more on historical, cultural, linguistic, and religious ties through more people-to-people exchanges. Thus, focus is on the use of more soft power potential to boost



strategic cooperation and tackle the grave issues of infrastructure development and security in North-eastern region and countering the Chinese dominance and existence.

Therefore, one of the most significant factors among the determinants of foreign policy is the personality factor, the ruling elite, state-building and party structure within the country. Moreover, there is also a great need for the right kind of personnel for the formulation and implementation of foreign policy within the country. The Foreign Ministers of India in person and the Ministry of External Affairs as a policymaking and interest articulating institution has over the time played its major role in increasing the affinity in India-ASEAN relations.

Northeast: Gateway to Southeast Asia

India's North-eastern Region (NER) is critical to the country's expanding economic and strategic ties with Southeast and East Asia. NER also serves as a land bridge between South and Southeast Asia, as part of India's Look East – Act East policy. Several national and international pathways are expected to pass through NER, either as a point of origin or as a point of destination, due to its strategic location.

NER shares more than 98% International boundary with the countries such as Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Myanmar and Thailand and Nepal which accounts for about a 4500 kilometres of land border.¹¹ However, the region is only connected by a narrow of only 21-kilometre-long landmass popularly known as the ‘Siliguri corridor’ or the ‘chicken's neck’ which forms only about 2% of its border with mainland India. Hence, the North-eastern region is a natural bridge with Southeast Asia and the proximity of the region has compelled India to focus on this region. However, North-eastern borders are not given due emphasis in India's foreign policy calculations. During British administration, railways and roads were developed by the government primarily to transport raw materials, tea, coal, oil, and other commodities out of Assam, but the disruption of historic trade routes persisted. However, between 1947 and 1971, NER lost its natural market.¹² The impacts of colonial legacies in the post-Cold War globalised world are dealt with the acceleration in the economic integration with its transnational neighbours in Southeast Asia. According to Rajiv Sikri, the launch of India's Look East policy envisages the North-eastern region not as a periphery of India, but as the centre of a thriving and integrated economic space linking the two dynamic region with a network of highways, railways, pipelines, transmission lines crisscrossing the region."¹³ The former Prime Minister Atal Bihar Vajpayee proposed holding of an India-ASEAN car rally at the ASEAN-India Summit in Bali 2003 to draw dramatic attention to India's geographical proximity with ASEAN countries.¹⁴ The ASEAN-India car rally was inaugurated by succeeding Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on 23rd of November, 2004, in Guwahati. Dr.

¹¹Gogoi, Jayanti. (2014). “Look East Policy: Potentialities for North-eastern Region” *India Journal of Applied Research*. Vol.4. May.

¹²Mukherjee, B.N. (1992). *External Trade of early Northeast India*. Har Annand Publication. New Delhi.

¹³Rajiv Sikri's Lecture. "Northeast India and India's look East Policy". In CENISEAS Forum "Towards a New Asia: Tran's nationalism and Northeast India.

¹⁴ 'ASEAN-India Dialogue Relations.' (n.d.) The official website for The Association for Southeast Asian Nations.



Singh described the NER as the ‘gateway’ to ‘Asian Century.’¹⁵ This attempt was to integrate Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, and Thailand and the North-eastern region. Thus, this form of sub regional cooperation could serve as a building block for greater economic interaction and integration between ASEAN and India. Northeast perspective emerged at the official level only in October 2007, in a meeting of the then Foreign Minister, Shri Pranab Mukherjee and the Chief Ministers of the Northeast States on the initiative of the Ministry of DoNER.¹⁶ Since this point onward, the government, especially the Ministry of Development of the North-eastern Region (DoNER) decided to take certain initiatives in order to reinvent the economy of the North-eastern Region (NER) by relying heavily on central funding. The LEP is an integral part of North-eastern Region Vision 2020—a roadmap for development of the Region dedicated by the Hon'ble P.M. to the people of the Northeast in July 2008.¹⁷

Three major aspects of LEP-NE have appeared:¹⁸

- Connectivity and Physical Infrastructure to facilitate trade.
- Trade and investment protocols.
- Shortfalls in operationalization of existing assets and facilities.
- Soft aspects of bi-lateral /multi-lateral relationships such as in tourism and enhanced people to people interaction through sports, culture academic and medical research etc.

As a result, India has initiated certain bilateral projects and became party to some multilateral projects, aimed at enhancing connectivity between the Northeast and Southeast Asia. The very first outcome of India's conscious efforts is the Indo-Myanmar Trade Agreement signed on January 31, 1994, for the establishment of trade based on equality and mutual benefit. The agreement specified that trade should be conducted through the designated custom posts, viz (a) Moreh in India (Manipur state) and Tamu in Myanmar (b) Champai in India (Mizoram state) and Rih in Myanmar and (c) other places they may be notified by mutual agreements between the two countries.¹⁹ The important ongoing and potential infrastructure projects in this regard are Moreh-Tamu-Kalewa Road, India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway, Trans Asian Highway, India-Myanmar rail linkages, Kaladan Multimodal project, the Stilwell road, Myanmar-India-Bangladesh gas and/or oil pipeline, Tamanthi Hydroelectricity project and optical fibre network between Northeast India and Southeast Asia.²⁰ However, these existing possibilities for the process of enhancing connectivity between India's Northeast and Southeast Asia is not an easy task; there are geographical, technical, political and security challenges that might limit or stunt the process of infrastructural development.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Look East Policy and The North-eastern States, 15 Feb. 2011. Ministry of Development of North-eastern Region. Govt. of India.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Look East Policy and The Northeastern States. 15 Feb. 2011. Ministry of Development of Northeastern Region. Government of India

²⁰ Ahmed, Asif. (2012). "India-ASEAN Relations in 21st century: Strategic Implications for India". *Strategic Analysis*.



Trade and Economic Development

Today, ASEAN has an estimated GDP of approximately 3.31 trillion U.S. dollars²¹ which together comprises the fourth largest economy of the world. It is not only one of the world's fastest growing markets but a major global hub of manufacturing, trade, retail, telecommunication, transportation, and consumer demands. It is only natural that India looks towards deepening of relations with ASEAN. Since, the level of economic development highly influences the foreign policy of any country. In today's globalized world economic development oriented foreign policy is a common phenomenon because many states look for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and the expansion and diversification of foreign trade. Globalization is an opportunity to extend their reach and dominance. Thus, economic development and trade become a focal point in foreign policy in the globalised era. It plays a dominant role in India's relation with Southeast Asian Nations. India has been pursuing a combined multilateral, regional and bilateral approach to trade policy with its proactive engagement in ASEAN. On 14 December 2005, India attended the First East Asia Summit (EAS) meeting where, with the world's major trading bloc leaders, it endorsed an enlarged ASEAN and subsequently East Asia Summit Free Trade Agreement. As it stands now however, India is not an APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation, a group spearheaded by Australia) member. The most often cited impetus for cooperation is converging economic interests. ASEAN and India are both significant markets in the world economy. At the time when the ASEAN-India Free Trade Agreement (AIFTA) was inked in August 2009, both had a combined market of almost 1.8 billion people and a combined GDP of US\$2.75 trillion.²² In a Summit held in New Delhi in December 2012 a key achievement was the Agreement on Free Trade not only in goods (which was entered into 2009) but also services and investments in which intensive negotiations have been held over a long period. Thus, economic cooperation is a dominant factor of India and Southeast Asia relations and marks for Indian interests in the region.

Issues related to Security

Since India became a dialogue partner of ASEAN, the aspect of Security transcends an important arena of discussion. There are numerous issues between India and ASEAN concerning to Security whether it is traditional or non-traditional. Security wise India's shared maritime border with Indonesia and Thailand, and long border with Myanmar, means that India and ASEAN share joint concern about and interest in counterterrorism, anti-piracy, counter narcotics and Sea Lane protections. In the sea, the primary shared security interest is promoting the Strait of Malacca, which connects the South China Sea to the Indian Ocean and is one of the busiest routes, carrying goods vital to the economic viability and energy security of India and ASEAN. Insulating the sea lanes from piracy and crime is thus a key concern for both sides. And while incidence of piracy has fallen significantly over the last few years, Singapore's recent warning of a possible terrorist attacks on oil tankers, suggests that the Strait will continue to be a Security concern.²³

²¹ "World Economic Outlook Database, October 2019". *IMF.org*. Retrieved 4 February 2020.

²² Parameswaran, Prashanth; *Strengthening ASEAN in the 21st Century Strengthening ASEAN Century*, The Project 2049 Institute, 27 May 2010.

²³ Chatterjee, Neil. 'Security Raised in Malacca Strait after Terror Warning'. *Reuters*. 4 March 2010.



On land, ASEAN and India both share concern about terrorism and organized crime. Transnational terrorism posed a significant danger to both India and ASEAN's security. As a result, terrorism presents a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for both to collaborate on strategic and economic interdependence. Though both parties have intensified their crackdowns in recent years, India's recent experience in the 2008 Mumbai attacks and the 2009 bombings of the J W Marriott and Ritz-Carlton hotels in Jakarta illustrate that terrorism will remain a threat in the future. In this regard, ASEAN and India can co-operate in various fields, including the sharing of intelligence and technologies as enshrined in the 2003 ASEAN-India Joint Declaration on Co-operation to Combat International Terrorism.

India also has a particular concern about its border with Myanmar where separatist group were waging decades old independence campaigned against New Delhi. The situation in Myanmar necessitates constant consultation and coordination between ASEAN and India, as well as a strategic vision of Myanmar's future by both, since it will directly affect their own.²⁴ Groups such as the Manipuri People's Liberation Front (MPLF), and the Assamese United Liberation Front (ULFA) have used North Western Burma as a safe haven since the 1990's.²⁵ The porous border has also long been a hub for smuggling drug trafficking and insurgency, with the United Nations Drug Control Program (UNDCP) and the International Narcotic Control Board (INCB) warning that Northeast India could become a major transit point for illicit drugs.²⁶ Even, shared concerns about the emerging Sino-Myanmar strategic partnership may possibly boost India-ASEAN security ties.

Devare Sudhir has suggested that there are three arguments in favour of India and ASEAN cooperating on security. First, India has a long history of peaceful interactions with Southeast Asia. Second, India is increasingly seen in Southeast Asia as a dynamic democracy focusing on knowledge and technology based economic development. Third, ASEAN continues to be a model of effective regional integration for India.²⁷ He also stated that India's ratification to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) in October 2003 maintained ASEAN's territorial integrity and sovereignty, as well as non-interference in ASEAN's internal affairs.²⁸

External Determinants of India's foreign policy towards South East Asia

Undoubtedly, the international environment plays an important role in shaping the foreign policy of every state. Since foreign policy in general is about the interaction of a state with another, this interaction only takes place at the international level and as such, cannot be ignored in analysing the foreign policy of any state. As scholars of realist school acknowledge the importance of both international and domestic factors, however, they argue that international factors play a more important role in determining country's foreign policy. The main external factors that determine India's foreign policy towards Southeast Asia are as follows:

²⁴ Devare, Sudhir (2006), *India and Southeast Asia: Towards Security Convergence*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

²⁵ Prashanth Parameswaran. (2010). "The Birth of Indo-Burmese Countries Urgency Co-operation?" *Asian Eye*. 23 February

²⁶ Col. Rahul Bhosle. (2007). "India's Look Myanmar's Policy". *Boloji.com*. Retrieved 28 July 2015.

²⁷ Devare, Sudhir (2006), *India and Southeast Asia: Towards Security Convergence*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

²⁸ Ibid.



The International System or Power Structure

First and foremost, factor that influences the foreign policy is the international system or the power structure within the international system. A prevalent framework of world politics plays decisive role in deciding the foreign policy of a country. As such foreign policies of states thus changes with the change in the international power structure. In a traditional multi-polar system, it was easier for states to switch sides and gain maximum interests from both sides. However, the international system during the entire Cold War period was characterized with a bi-polar system. But, with the end of cold war the international system was characterized by an emergence of a uni-polar system with the US as the only hegemonic power. However, later with the acceleration of globalization a multi-polar world order has come into being. These events have restructured the power system and have a significant effect on the foreign policies of states. Similarly, in all these different stages such as that of the cold war period, where there was an ideological tussle between two major blocs, both India and several countries of Southeast Asia found themselves on different planes. However, with the end of cold war and emergence of a uni-polar world order a change in attitudes of the countries of Southeast Asia and India led to an enhanced India-ASEAN relation. And, in the present day, the international system marked by a multi-polar world order has further provided a conducive environment for enhanced ASEAN-India relations. Even more, the world today is witnessing a global power shift. This shift in power is from West to East and this is even supported by the US National Intelligence Council's assessment of Global Trends report of 2015 which concludes that, by 2030, diffusion of power is going to restore Asia's weight in global politics to a level not seen since 1750; and, this structural shift in power is to be bolstered by the shared normative frameworks and mechanisms by the actors of the region known as Indo Pacific. Therefore, in this background ASEAN-India relations remain significant, and potentials of this affiliation cannot be disregarded.

Myanmar shows India the Road to Southeast Asia

The state of Myanmar (earlier known as Burma) in itself holds a special place of strategic significance to India right from independence to the present day. At the earliest, it was realised when the Japanese invasion of the northeast Indian territories of Nagaland and Manipur during the Second World War took place through Myanmar. Therefore, referring to the importance of Myanmar (or Burma as identified in contemporary period) in India's security, K.M. Panikkar cited as early as 1944, that, *'The defence of Burma is in fact the defence of India, and it is India's primary concern no less than Burma's to see that its frontiers remain inviolate. In fact, no responsibility can be considered too heavy for India when it comes to the question of defending Burma.'*²⁹

Thus, it can be held that Myanmar shows India the road to Southeast Asia. A significant reason being, after independence, the partition of East Bengal aka Bangladesh, furthered the strategic isolation of the northeast from the rest of the country. This enhanced the struggles for New Delhi in meeting the external threats in these territories and hence enhanced the vulnerability of the northeast to external interferences. This added to the

²⁹K.M. Panikkar, *The Future of Southeast Asia*, Macmillan, New York, 1944, 46. Quoted in Ton That Thien, op. cit, 69.



significance of Myanmar as a strategic buffer between India and China. For that reason, independent India's policy of providing military supplies, economic assistance and political endorsement to Myanmar can be better understood in context of Indian political and military concerns regarding the emerging powers of Communist China. Although, all this is aimed at preventing destabilization in India's own volatile region i.e., the north-eastern region, but it has even facilitated in maintaining a friendly buffer between India and China which is strategically significant to India in its own sense. Besides this, in the present day there are many areas of concentration including the problems of migration and the Rohingyas issue, and the problems of insurgency and democracy within Myanmar which influences the harmony and stability of the north-eastern borders and community and stimulates domestic politics thus, indicates the significance of Myanmar in Indian foreign policy formulations and calculations.

Discontent with SAARC

As the post-Cold War era progresses, the trend towards increasing inter- and intra-regional political and economic cooperation became more apparent. However, despite this, India's participation in the South Asian Association for regional Cooperation (SAARC)³⁰ has not resulted in greater trade or security. There is a lack of intra-regional trade due to the lack of comparative advantages of participating countries in the SAARC which has led to the low level of trade among the member countries. Due to this, the small economies have resorted to non-tariff barriers such as those related to anti-dumping measures to prevent the entry of cheaper goods from India.³¹ Bilateral disputes between India and Pakistan such as over the disputed territory of Kashmir, the issue of water sharing with Bangladesh, the problem of illegal migrants from Nepal, and nuclear weapon tests have together impeded the development of regionalism in SAARC contrary to its popular goals and principles. The fact that these neighbouring countries have antagonistic relations with New Delhi undermines India's position. Thus, India's growing concern about the erosion of its regional status due to the lack of political trust within this regional grouping and sluggish economic progress of the member countries of the SAARC increased her discontent with this regional grouping and led to upsurge in economic interest and integration with the ASEAN. Impressed with the economic progress made by ASEAN and its objective of achieving economic integration for all its members India has been making efforts to expand its relations with the region since the 1990's.

US pivot towards Asia

³⁰SAARC came into force in 1985, and has seven members: India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, and Maldives. Although SAARC has made little progress in terms of economic integration, some progress is being made in sub-regional cooperation. For example, the BIMSTEC (Bangladesh-India Myanmar-Sri Lanka-Thailand Economic Cooperation, which was established in 1997) has taken some positive steps in regional cooperation, including the signing of the Framework Agreement for a BIMSTEC FTA, the establishment of the BIMSTEC Chamber of Commerce, the establishment of the BIMSTEC Centre in Bangkok, and the pledge to move forward with renewed vigour.

³¹India has been a forerunner in terms of exports, but its share of imports has been low. In 2004, India's export value to SAARC was US\$4.26 billion, while its import value from SAARC was only US\$0.84 billion. See IMF, Direction of Trade and Statistics Yearbook, 2005.



When former US President Barack Obama took office in January 2009, he inherited a foreign policy beset by the 2008 economic crisis and a stalled Middle East peace process. He described his foreign strategy as "smart power," which combines hard and soft power.³² The Obama administration pursued a smart power foreign policy in Southeast Asia. In 2010, the Obama administration unveiled the Asian Pivot Policy. The announcement suggested a policy push, indicating that Asia is the US's top priority. This strategy was also viewed as a two-pronged approach to balancing China while also reengaging in shaping East Asian security architecture.³³ Because the phrase 'pivot' sounded 'tactical and ephemeral,' the Obama administration later dropped it and replaced it with the term 'rebalance.'³⁴ Another reason for the change could be that it included an implied reference to resisting China's ascent, as well as the potential strain on Sino-US relations.³⁵ The US argued that Asia's expansion provided an opportunity for mutual benefit for both the US and Asia.³⁶ The US has also made attempts to improve its relations with ASEAN and ASEAN-centered multilateral structures since the launch of the Asia Pivot Policy. The United States was the first country to send a mission and an ambassador to the US Mission to ASEAN in Jakarta, which opened in 2008.³⁷ In 2009, the then US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, participated at the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the US also acceded to ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) of ASEAN on 22 July 2009. This can be understood as an acknowledgement from the US that it accepts the ASEAN Way of functioning and supports ASEAN's centrality in shaping the security architecture.

The US Asia Pivot Policy, as it is known, was an attempt by the Obama administration to reengage with East Asian countries economically and strategically. It has taken extraordinary gestures in this process, such as signing the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation with ASEAN, indicating that it accepts the ASEAN Way in developing regional security and economic arrangements. This can be read as an indirect attempt to strengthen its traditional East Asian friends while also gaining new supporters in the US's quest to engage China. The US, on the other hand, has made no mention of China's rise as a rationale for such policy formulation. It is clear that the strategy has more security connotations than economic dynamics. This is considered as an attempt by the Obama administration to engage ASEAN on a multilateral level while simultaneously focusing on bilateral relations. This demonstrates that this policy is essentially a continuation of the hub-and-spoke system. This might also be regarded as a response mechanism to China's prospective threat to the United States' status as the regional security power. China's rise and assertiveness on regional territorial claims might

³² Joseph S. Nye, Jr., "Obama and Smart Power," in Michael Cox and Doug Strokes (eds.), *US Foreign Policy*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2012, p. 97.

³³ Clinton Hillary, "America's Pacific Century," *Foreign Policy*, 11 October 2011. http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/10/11/americas_pacific_century, accessed on 26 June 2013.

³⁴ Douglas T. Stuart, "The Pivot to Asia: Can It Serve as the Foundation for American Grand Strategy in the 21st Century?" *Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War, College Press, United States*, August 2016, p. 9.

³⁵ Richard Weitz, "Pivot Out, Rebalance In," *The Diplomat*, 03 May 2012.

³⁶ Peter A. Petri, "Asia and the World Economy in 2030: Growth, Integration, and Governance," in Ashley Tellis, Andrew Marble, Travis Tanner, (eds.), *Strategic Asia 2010-11: Asia's Rising Power and America's Continued Purpose*, The National Bureau of Asian Research, Washington DC, 2010, pp. 49-50, 67.

³⁷ US Signs Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC). Thailand, 22 July 2009, ASEAN Secretariat. <http://www.asean.org/uploads/archive/PR-42AMM-US-Signed-TAC.pdf>, accessed on 9 November 2009.



be considered as probable causes for the US Asia pivot Policy, in which the interests of ASEAN, India, and the US appear to be aligned. As a result, ASEAN can be considered as a response mechanism to China's rise, hedging on the US and India.

India has been cautious in its official replies to the United States' rebalancing policy stance thus far. It could be for a variety of reasons, including a desire to avoid upsetting China, India's major trading partner. Another likely explanation is that India does not want to upset the regional power balance by becoming a third wheel in the power struggle between the US and China for regional supremacy. It is clear that the United States and India are linked by their shared concern about China. Therefore, India's Look East Policy, is considered as complementary to the United States' rebalancing to Asia Pacific, where their global security objectives overlap.³⁸ However, it is known that both the US and India, have not publicly indicated that China's rise has influenced their policy aims in Southeast Asia.

The China Factor

One of the most significant reasons why Southeast Asia remains strategically important to India's foreign policy in the present day is due to the emergence of China as a major power in Asia, adjacent to both India and Southeast Asia. China's rapid rise and assertive policy have created threatening circumstances throughout East Asia. As we can see in India's situation, there is a never-ending territorial dispute with China. China is also making concerted measures to hinder India's friendly relations in the subcontinent. Both have become important challenges for the Indian government, and a lot of time and resources have been spent on them. With India's growing engagement with Southeast Asian governments, China is assuming a greater role in the region. India's relationship with the Southeast Asian countries appears to have always been based on China's policies. According to Mohammad Ayoob:

“New Delhi 's renewed preoccupation with China has boosted the importance of

Southeast Asia in the eyes of the Indian decision-making elite because of the region's proximity to both India and China and the fact that it has been long considered a meeting ground of Chinese and Indian cultural and political influence. Just as the Indian obsession with the _Pakistan factor 'had enhanced the importance of West Asia in New Delhi 's calculation in the 1950s and the 1960s, the increasing Indian concern with the China factor 'in 1970s and 1980s has worked to enhance the strategic and political importance of Southeast Asia in New Delhi's perceptions. ”³⁹

This statement made by Ayoob in his seminal work is still relevant in the twenty-first century. Since a long time, India has been heavily focused on China's rapid economic and military progress, which has encouraged India to actively engage with countries in the Southeast Asian region as well as the wider East Asian region. With the end of the Cold War

³⁸ “Joint Press Briefing by Secretary Carter and Minister Parrikar in the Pentagon Briefing Room,” The US Department of Defense, December 10, 2015. <https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript-View/Article/929778/joint-press-conference-by-secretary-carter-and-minister-parrikar-in-the-pentago/>, accessed on 18 January 2016.

³⁹ Mohammed Ayoob. (1990), *India and Southeast Asia: Indian Perceptions and Policies*, (London: Routledge), p. 28.



era, China evolved rapidly to become one of the world's main powers, and so became a key role in determining the nature of India's relationship with Southeast Asia. India, on the other hand, is eager to establish links with the Southeast Asian region with little or no reservations, and as a result, it must occasionally deal with China.

Because of the inconsistencies in India's and South Asia's relations, China has been able to expand its influence in the region. China took advantage of the situation and went above by creating a naval port along the Arabian Sea coast in Gwadar, Pakistan. Similarly, China approved Bangladesh's proposal to use its Chittagong port, which India had hoped to use but had been unsuccessful in doing so. The Chittagong port is important to India since it is used to carry natural gas from Myanmar to the country's northeast. In April 2005, China also inked a comprehensive deal with Sri Lanka, according to which China can use Colombo 's ports which gives China an access to the Indian Ocean.

MGC and BIMSTEC are Indian initiatives that are like China's Greater Mekong subregion initiative, which includes Myanmar, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, and China's Yunnan province. The Greater Mekong Initiative, led by China, is primarily intended to develop Yunnan Province, which is currently underdeveloped. India, on the other hand, aims to develop its remote and isolated North-eastern states through its programmes. While both India and China are capable of cooperating on these projects, the distance between Yunnan province and India's north-eastern states is quite short. India and China, on the other hand, elected not to include each other in their own projects. However, it is clear that both India and China have been competing to draw Southeast Asian states to their respective plans. This is done by influencing the states that are closest to them geographically, such as Myanmar. In addition, India has worked hard to keep China away from sub-regional organisations. Surprisingly, neither of these competitors has been rejected by the SEA governments, and they have joined their endeavour, profiting on both sides. India was also concerned on a military level, as China had played a key role in supplying Myanmar with military technology and equipment. To counter China's growing military might in Southeast Asia, India and a few ASEAN countries have begun joint military exercises. The Indian Navy has participated in joint exercises with the Vietnamese, South Korean, Singaporean and Japanese Navies to guarantee the protection of strategic maritime routes in the region.

During the Cold War, ASEAN countries relied on a 'great power balance' for their security, but the departure of forces by the US and Russia from their respective bases sparked a debate about the 'power vacuum' hypothesis, which China is expected to fill. The ASEAN members were also forced to craft out a new strategy to ensure "balance of power" politics in the Asia-Pacific due to an uncertain US stance toward the area. Concerns about China's ascent in terms of economic and military influence inside ASEAN have been openly expressed at this time. This fear is fuelled by recollections of historical hatred, China's southerly expansion, and its unpredictable nature, as well as its growing assertiveness in the South China Sea region. That is, Beijing's disputes with Vietnam over the Spratly Islands and the Philippines over Mischief Reef in the South China Sea have further added to their fear and concern about China's growing economic, military, and diplomatic power.



Meanwhile, proponents of China's containment policy among India's strategic elites push for a larger role in the area to counter Beijing's expanding influence and might. They outline a number of potential strategies that "the formation of new alignments involving U.S., the states of SEA and other regional powers include India, which have been traditionally antipathetic towards China".⁴⁰ While India has its own security and economic motivations in its quest of a deeper and more meaningful strategic engagement with ASEAN member states, the China factor has a significant impact on India's LEP— a phrase that defines India's engagement policy with ASEAN and East Asian countries.

South China Sea Dispute

The South China Sea is situated between Asia's eastern and southern shores. China and Taiwan are to the north, the Philippines and Borneo are to the east, the Gulf of Thailand is to the southwest, and the Gulf of Tonkin and the Chinese island of Hainan are to the west. The sea covers a total area of 2,319,000 square kilometres (895,400 square miles). Manila, Singapore, Bangkok, Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon), Hong Kong, and Macau are the major ports on or near this sea. The Mekong and the Xi Jiang are the two major rivers that flow into the South China Sea. Shipping and sea fishing are key economic activities.

The main point of contention in the South China Sea is control of the Spratly Islands, a series of 230 tiny islands and reefs. Their significance has greatly enhanced since the discovery of substantial oil deposits and because they provide access to enormous fishing grounds.⁴¹

The Spratly Islands, a chain of islands with more than six hundred islets, coral reefs, sandbars, and atolls, has been a source of conflict since the 1950s. The islands are located northwest of Brunei, Malaysia's state of Sabah, and Palawan, the largest Philippine Island. China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Brunei, Malaysia, and the Philippines all claim ownership of parts or all of the Spratly Islands. Itu Aba, with a total area of thirty-six hectares (90 acres), is the largest of the twelve main islets; none are permanently inhabited. According to geological surveys, the Spratly Islands are home to massive oil and gas reserves, maybe greater than any previously discovered. The islands are also located near major shipping routes. Except for Brunei, all the competing claimants have military bases on one or more of the islands. Armed conflicts occur on a regular basis in the region; in a fight between China and Vietnam in 1988, more than seventy people were murdered. Because China has so far refused to submit the dispute to international courts, the Spratly Islands are seen as a potential hotspot for regional conflict.

⁴⁰C. Raja Mohan, 'Fostering Strategic Stability and Promoting Regional Cooperation,' in Gary K. Bertsch, Seema Gahlaut and Anupam Srivastava (ed.), *Engaging India: US Strategic Relations with the World's Largest Democracy*, New York: Routledge, 1999, p.38.

⁴¹Bellamy, Alex J. (2004), "The Pursuit of Security in Southeast Asia: Beyond Realism", in Mark Beeson (ed.), *Contemporary Southeast Asia: Regional Dynamics, National Difference*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.



In negotiations with foreign claimants over the South China Sea, China appeared to pursue a dual track policy, a "talk and take strategy," including both diplomacy and unilateral, aggressive assertion of its claims.⁴² From the US perspective, the Spratly issue poses several problems. It is certainly a definite hazard to regional stability and may pose a long-term threat to the ASEAN's unity and effectiveness as well. The United States does not judge the merits of any of the disputants' claims, rather, it supports ninety-four freedom of navigation and a peaceful resolution of the dispute through regional not the US mediation.⁴³

Geo-Strategic Concerns and World Order

In the emerging post-Cold War contour of international politics in the Asia-Pacific and SEA, the importance of ASEAN increases due to the geo-political interconnection between South and SEA⁴⁴ and strategic location of the region as it strides between the Pacific and the Indian Ocean, controlling major trade routes and sea lines. Since the Pacific and the Indian Oceans are fast overtaking the Atlantic Ocean in terms of strategic shift, the importance of ASEAN region has increased. Moreover, as India and SEA are geopolitically interconnected peace and stability, and goodwill of ASEAN is vital to India's security and economic development. From the perspective of countries of SEA, India is important as the region is placed between India and China.⁴⁵

New Delhi is also concerned about Beijing's expanding influence in Southeast Asia, notably in Myanmar, which is strategically important. Whereas New Delhi is also irritated by China's strategic ties with Pakistan which demonstrates China's indirect intervention in South Asia.⁴⁶ From New Delhi's point of view, India needs to counter China's continuing strategic engagement with Pakistan to prevent India from being locked into the South Asia region. Without strengthening relations with ASEAN member states, Faizal Yahya believes that "India risks being isolated and outflanked by the strategic cooperation between China and Pakistan".⁴⁷

⁴²Nathan, K S; (1998-1999), "Principal Trends and Features of the Current Balance of Power in the Asia-Pacific Region", Asian Defence Journal (ADJ), Asian Defence Yearbook 1998-1999, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Percetakan Oscar SDN BHD.

⁴³Wood, Perry (1996), "The United States and Southeast Asia: Towards a New Era", in Dianne L. Smith, (ed.) (1996), "Overview", Asian Security to the Year 2000, Accessed 20 June 2017, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/PUB86.pdf>.

⁴⁴ For details on the geopolitical interconnection between South (India particularly) and Southeast Asia see Daljit Singh, 'The Geopolitical Interconnection between South and South-East Asia,' in Frederic Grare and Amitabh Mattoo (ed.), India and ASEAN: The Politics of India's Look East Policy, New Delhi: Manohar, 2001, pp. 21-40. Singh in his article argues that the two regions are geographically contiguous having land border between Myanmar and both Bangladesh and India. In the maritime sphere also the Indian Andaman-Nicobar Island chain, which is about 750 km long and with a sizeable Exclusive Economic Zone is located near the entrance to the Straits of Malacca, with the southernmost point only about 128 km from the northern tip of Sumatra.

⁴⁵Faizal Yahya, 'India and Southeast Asia: Revisited,' Contemporary Southeast Asia, Volume 25, Number 1, April 2003, p. 95.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 80.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 84.



In his closing remarks to the IDSA's 7th Asian Security Conference, then Defense Minister Pranab Mukherjee expressed India's grave worry over growing Chinese influence in Southeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific region. He foregrounded the trend towards Asia-Pacific in terms of economy and said that the area is experiencing a realignment of "geo-strategic equations" when speaking at the conference. The emergence of China and the political elements of its rising regional economic participation are among the most significant trends. China is not only gaining economic power in the region, but it is also determined to guarantee that the geopolitical context supports its expansion and consolidation.⁴⁸ It is enough to say that India and ASEAN member nations agreed on China's rise and future involvement in the region. India, with its booming economy, big size, and large pool of human resource, is considered as a strong countering force against China from the ASEAN perspective. The fact that ASEAN members chose India as a discussion partner in 1995 attests to India's ability to act as a counterbalance to China.⁴⁹ In the late 1980s and early 1990s, when China was asserting itself militarily in Southeast Asia with its claims to the Spratly and Paracel Islands, ASEAN leaders saw India as significantly less of a danger than it had been only a few years before. In the post-Cold War strategic alignment in Southeast Asia, India was seen as a potential counterweight to Chinese hegemony.⁵⁰ Since, there was anxiety among the ASEAN member states regarding the stability and security of the region over the withdrawal of U.S. military base from Subic Bay (Philippines) and the erstwhile Soviet military base from Kam Ranh (Vietnam).

Therefore, ASEAN and India can both find each other useful when facing the strategic challenges posed by the rise of China in Asia. For India, Southeast Asia presents one avenue to diversify its relationships in the face of Beijing's growing influence in the region. For instance, when India became alarmed that Chinese support for upgrading Myanmar's naval facilities, including electronic listening posts and radar stations, help made Myanmar 'a Chinese satellite in the Indian Ocean,' it moved to woo the junta with greater economic and military cooperation. Reciprocally, for some ASEAN states, greater interaction with India could help dilute Chinese influence in line with the organization's philosophy of engaging all interested powers and not being dominated by any single hegemony.⁵¹ For example, Indonesia and Singapore's proposal to bring Australia, India and New Zealand into the East Asian Summit was widely perceived to dilute 'Chinese dominance' in regional architecture. The objective of closer ASEAN-Indian ties here would not be to contain Beijing, but to jointly manage its rising profile in the region in a peaceful and constructive way. The Asia-Pacific region would also benefit from a tightly knit ASEAN-Indian relationship.

⁴⁸India's Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee's concluding speech at the 7th Asian Security Conference, organized by Institute of Defence and Strategic Analysis, New Delhi, 2005. Available online < <http://www.idsa.in/node/1554>> accessed on 5 January 2014.

⁴⁹Michael Leifer, 'Indonesia's Encounter with China and the Dilemmas of Engagement,' in Alastair Iain Johnston and Robert S. Ross (ed.), *Engaging China: The Management of an Emerging Power*, London: Routledge, 1999, p. 103.

⁵⁰Op. cit., Manjeet S. Pardesi, 2012, p. 119.

⁵¹ Parameswaran, Prashanth; *Strengthening ASEAN in the 21st Century Strengthening ASEAN Century*, the Project 2049 Institute, 27 May 2010.



Non-Traditional Security Concerns

Discussion on non-traditional security concerns of India-ASEAN relations identifies some major issues including terrorism, nuclear energy, energy security, food and health security, human rights, challenges of migration, and problems related to climate change and natural disasters as a non-traditional security challenge in the present day. Let us look at some major points of discussion. Southeast Asia, with its densely populated coastlines and huge agricultural sectors, is particularly vulnerable to climate change. According to ADB and WWF projections, ASEAN countries, particularly impoverished ones like Cambodia and Laos, could face significant risk from energy shortages and declining crop yields in the near future, while low-lying ‘mega-cities’ such as Manila and Jakarta will be highly vulnerable to rising sea levels, tropical storms, droughts and heat waves, etc.⁵² All this is the result of climate change and global warming conditions. Meanwhile, in India, monsoon seasons are getting more difficult to predict and may become hotter in duration,⁵³ cyclones could become more frequent and intense, and crop yields could decrease by 30% by 2050.⁵⁴ Hence, a negative impact on crop yield production is straightforwardly predicted with a hint of implied health and standard of living challenges. Either way, which has the potential to dangerously impact the export, growth and development in economy. While ASEAN and India have facilitated cooperation in the area of non-traditional security by creating an ASEAN-India Network on Climate Change and the Green Fund, there remains great potential for further collaboration in the future, such as cooperation in the agricultural sector to meet the challenge of food and health security.⁵⁵

Besides, the two parties also share a common commitment to assisting each other with disaster relief and management, which became an avenue for cooperation that was visibly demonstrated by the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami that rocked the South and Southeast Asia. It was one of the deadliest natural disasters in recorded history. Another major non-traditional security concern that needs attention in the present day is terrorism. Terrorism has been a major impediment on the realization of the goal of regional stability. It imposes direct threat to the security of the community and hinders economic development and disrupts the peace and stability in the region. This factor needs special attention of both the players in the region as it upsets the growth and development. Migration also highly influences the economic development. Therefore, non-traditional security threats find themselves as manifestation of pivotal change in India-ASEAN relation.

⁵² Trends drawn from various reports: Asian Development Bank; *The Economics of Climate Change in Southeast Asia: A Regional Overview*, April 2009. World Wildlife Fund; *Mega-Stress for Mega-Cities: A Climate Vulnerability Ranking of Major Coastal Cities in Asia*, WWF Report, 2009. Asian Development Bank; *Climate Change: Strengthening Adaptation and Mitigation in Asia and the Pacific*, December 2009.

⁵³ Devraj, Ranjit; *Climate Change: India’s Monsoon Predictions More Uncertain*, Inter Press Service, 27 June 2009

⁵⁴ Chattopadhyay, N.; *Climate Change and Food Security in India*, Indian Meteorological Department, August 2008.

⁵⁵ Singh, Manmohan; *Prime Minister’s Statement at the 7th India-ASEAN Summit*, Indian Press Information Bureau, 24 October 2009.



Participation in Sub-Regional Groupings

Participation in sub-regional groupings by India is becoming a key aspect of the country's efforts to strengthen ties with strategically important SEA countries. The reality is evidenced by India's active engagement in sub-regional groups such as BIMST-EC and MGC. BIMST-EC was founded in 1997 at Thailand's request as part of its "Look West Policy," with the goal of constructing a free trade zone among member states by 2017. Its agenda also includes a deal to combat terrorism, as well as cooperation in the fields of energy and the environment. Nepal and Bhutan, two more South Asian countries, were also inducted into the BIMST-EC. India can expect to prevent increasing Chinese involvement in the South Asian region through BIMSTE-C, which could be harmful to India given its tumultuous relationship with New Delhi and its smaller neighbours. Second, this sub-regional grouping can serve as a convenient forum for India to initiate confidence-building measures with member states in South Asia and Southeast Asia, whose tense relations with India in the past have allowed external powers such as China to spread their influence in regions with critical security implications for India.

The "Mekong Ganga Collaboration Initiative" (MGCI) was launched in 2000 under India's sponsorship between India and five Mekong riparian states, including Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, and Thailand, to promote tourism, culture, and education cooperation within the sub-region. Because of their proximity to China and India, these five riparian states not only make up the mainland SEA, but they are also strategically vital. This pushed India to pay special attention to these countries. Despite public promises that the organisation is neither directed at China or a tool of enhancing India's power projection, China is conspicuously absent from the group. The six-nation MGCI group was envisioned as a way for India to capitalise on its long-standing cultural ties with Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar, as well as to strengthen ASEAN links beyond the original six fast-growing nations.

The economic potentials of member states and concerns over China's overwhelming sway over the SEA region are the key driving elements behind these sub-regional groups. New Delhi seeks to strengthen its relationship with ASEAN by engaging ASEAN governments bilaterally through such regional organisations. Because BIMST-EC includes nations from the South and Southeast Asia, it can function as a link between the two regions' economies. Furthermore, through trade and economic linkages under the BIMST-EC forum, India can hope to cultivate good neighbourly relations with its strategically important South Asian neighbours such as Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, thereby offsetting moves by any external powers' hostile to India in the short and long term. It is critical to cultivate cordial and warm relations with India's South Asian neighbours, who often suspect India's hegemonic design in the region, in order to prevent any existing or potential hostile powers from consolidating their political power over the region, which could be detrimental to India's interests. In terms of development initiatives as well as managing insurgency movements, BIMST-EC has significant significance for India's Northeast area.



The Indian Diaspora

The presence of Indian diaspora or the people of Indian origin in Southeast Asia, primarily in larger numbers in Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Brunei, provided significant contribution to the economic and politico-strategic policy towards the region. The Indian Diaspora is a generic term to describe those, who migrated from India and their descendants. This diaspora is composed of Non – Resident Indians (NRIs), who have migrated from India, Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs), who have acquired the citizenship of some other country and Stateless Persons of Indian Origin (SPIOs), which include the homeless, displaced, refugees, etc. Presently, the Indian Diaspora spans the globe and stretches across all the oceans and continents. It is estimated to be about twenty million people of Indian origin, who live and work in foreign countries and constitute an important link with the motherland. Since, all countries with large overseas communities are engaged in developing policy frameworks and mechanisms to leverage this important resource in pursuit of their national interests. This phenomenon has been brought to prominence by the end of the Cold War, the processes of globalization and economic liberalization. At present, there are seven million Indians living in Southeast Asia. The Indian Diaspora community in Myanmar alone numbers over two million, with origins from colonial period.⁵⁶ In Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Brunei, the number has grown significantly. They not only function as a bridge between India and the ASEAN countries. These Overseas Indians living in Southeast Asia have played an incredibly significant role in transmitting Indian cultural values, cuisines and films throughout the region and thus retained and strengthened the cultural relations between the two regions.⁵⁷ Besides, their contribution also reaches India in the form of annual remittances, NRI deposits and NRI equity investments and adds to the economy of the country. These people also hold important positions within these countries including the banking industry, medicines, financial services, IT, and politics, etc. Therefore, Indian Diaspora emerges as an important determinant of Indian foreign policy today. It is to be noted that, the people of Indian origin in different parts of Southeast Asia did not suffer as much discrimination as that they did in Myanmar. This was confirmed when in 1960s the military dominated government in Myanmar proposed to confiscate Indian business and property, leading to migration of large numbers of Indians from Myanmar to India all through that decade.⁵⁸ Although people of Indian origin in other parts of South East Asia did not suffer from a similar degree of overt discrimination that they did in Myanmar, nevertheless, there were some occasional problems that arose in this connection and were always treated by the Indian government as the minor irritants in India's relationship with the host countries rather than as a major issue of national prestige.

⁵⁶ Public Diplomacy Division, Indian Ministry of External Affairs, "India-Myanmar Relations," July 2012.

⁵⁷ Sharma, Rouble; 'India and ASEAN in the 21st Century', *Third Concept*, May 2012.

⁵⁸ See R.G. Sawhney, 'Burma,' in U.S. Bajpai (ed.), *India and its Neighbourhood*, Lancer International, New Delhi, 1986, p. 352.



Conclusion

In addition, to these broad frameworks of determining factors of India and Southeast Asia relations within the domestic and external spheres there are several factors at play swaying reinforcement of relations. Most significant among these is the personality factor, the ruling elite, state-building and party structure within the country as seen previously. The state actors along with non-state actors such as the people, the media, the NGOs, and the international bodies such as the United Nations (UN) and its affiliates, and the international financial institutions, such as International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) etc., also form a key proponent in shaping India's relation with their neighbour in the Southeast. However, India's foreign policy is thus, often affected by its membership of international, regional and sub-regional organizations. Nevertheless, scholars of international relations still disagree about the role that International Organizations play in the foreign policies of nation-states. The realist approach in the international politics has generally had less confidence in the effectiveness of international organizations. Therefore, international organizations are considered as only a marginal factor in world politics. This is also otherwise regarded as the 'bottom-up' perspective, i.e., how the foreign policies of states impact international organizations rather vice-versa. Moreover, there is also a great need for the right kind of personnel for the formulation and implementation of foreign policy within the country. The Foreign Ministers of India in person and the Ministry of External Affairs as a policymaking and interest articulating institution has over the time played its major role in increasing the affinity in India-ASEAN relations.