

INDIA AND ASEAN RELATIONS: CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

In the Post Cold War Scenario, after dis-integration of Soviet Union, the United States of America emerged as the single largest super power by the virtue of which the importance of several regional literal and multilateral strategic groups increased. In order to further the strategic interest, India's "Look East Policy" was initially mainly focused on Economic Interest in ASEAN region in the early years of globalization. This Article deals with the transition of the "Look East Policy" to the contemporary "Act East Policy".

KEYWORDS: ASEAN, Cold War, Strategic Partnership, Globalization, Connectivity, South China Sea, Look East Policy, Act East Policy

INTRODUCTION

In the Post Cold war Era in International Politics, World order system drastically changed from bi-polar to uni-polar and Uni-polar to Multi-polar. International Relations were redefined and the significance of various regional groups increased manifold to ensure global security and prosperity due to which political security and economic systems faced changes at a large scale. In this mean multi- polar world, new alliances were formed and new powers eg. China emerged. After considering the various challenges India drastically evolved its Foreign Policy, emphasizing regional cooperation hence consolidated relationship with ASEAN.

Historically India shared its cultural and trade connectivity with ASEAN countries. Buddhism had its roots in Indian, which got later spread in South East Asian Countries. India's soft power in the form of Buddhism, Gandhism, helped consolidate its relationship with ASEAN in add situation too. Indonesia was the host of Boundary conclave which later emerged as the Non- aligned Movement. However, ASEAN region subsequently become less energetic about NAM Geographically, Myanmar is known as the gateway to ASEAN for India which shares 1633 Kms. of land borders with India and Indonesia and Thailand shares a maritime boundary with Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

During the ASEAN financial crisis, South East Asian countries were well known for there excellent economic situation. ASEAN as a regional organization came into being in 1967 but due to cold war politics the influence of USA was stronger, see India Relation were not too good for ASEAN. But after the end of cold war, India especially launched "Look East Policy" for ASEAN in 1998 for better infrastructure community and economic cooperation.

The India Myanmar Thailand (IMT) Tri-lateral highway is the last example of infrastructure development for physical connectivity with ASEAN. To boost trade India established robust road and rail connectivity in this region.

While India has made considerable progress in implementing the IMT trilateral highway and the Kaladev Multimodal project, issues related to increasing the maritime and air connectivity between ASEAN and India and transforming the corridors of connectivity into economic corridors are under discussion. A possible extension to IMT highway to Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam is also under consideration, which will boost the trade in India and ASEAN in further, and people to people contact will increase.

The US Army built naval basis in eg. In Singapore in South East Asia during the cold war era to contain the growing power of communist. On the other hand in the post-cold war are the influence of China increased at a very fast face.

The growing rivalry between the USA and China, threatened the security of India and ASEAN countries. Expansive and Attacking military and economic policy of China, challenged the 70 years strong Naval Supremacy of the USA in Indo- Pacific Region. In response to this, Hillary Clinton the then Foreign Secretary of USA appealed to India not only "Look" but also "Act" in the region.

In the Contemporary scenario, India aspires to be a global power. India and ASEAN are cooperating on various fronts especially after the Look East Policy were launched as the pay factor of India foreign policy by the Narsimha Rao Government. All spheres of bi-lateral relationship including the strategic, economic cultural, terrorism and disaster management are those which need to be taken into consideration. ASEAN is strategically important for security prospective in Indo- Pacific region. Maritime security is the important factor in the Indian Ocean for India & ASEAN, ASEAN is located between India and the Pacific Ocean, where central major sea root for the entire world. Most of India's trade takes place through this route.

India emerging as a global power has provided ASEAN countries to maintain their autonomy in International politics also providing the opportunity to break away from the hegemonies tradition of China and Japan in this region. A relationship between ASEAN and India growing positively since 1992. In 1996 India becomes dialogue partner in ASEAN Regional Forum. Cooperation between ASEAN countries is strategically and economically important, for India, hence India started participating regularly in East Asia Summit since 2002. ASEAN's market has been growing fast and India is the 4th largest trade partner of ASEAN. India wants to balance expensive territorial policy of China and wants to increase its influence in this region.

On the occasion of 69th Republic Day of India, all Head of State ASEAN Countries were invited. This was a huge change in India's policy which shows the importance of ASEAN in India's foreign policy. On this occasion. India ASEAN summit was organized in New Delhi. Them of this summit was ASEAN India progress and prosperity and someday ASEAN - India friendship silver Jubilee 2018 was organized. These programmes are expected to boost ties between India and ASEAN. External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj stated that "India and ASEAN friendship is centuries old, which are connected with Buddhism and Ramayana. Eight ASEAN countries out of 10 pledged Ramayana." The purpose of these programmes was to strengthen cultural, strategic ties.

India shares a maritime boundary and needs to protect it's for promotion and protection of their security concerns. maritime security is must for the smooth trade and free mitigation of ships. India and ASEAN share a common ground of cooperation on this issues. In the South China sea, China wants to control the sea line of communication by building Naval bases on artificial islands and reefs. China establishes Radar, surveillance and military services in the South China sea,

ASEAN countries see India as a "New Hope". ASEAN countries want that India to act more in this region. On the other hand, India sees the opportunity in ASEAN markets. ASEAN countries are known as 'Asian Tigers' for their high growth rate, India wants to commercial and trade benefit from ASEAN.

India ASEAN trade relations have been growing continuously with India being ASEAN's 7th largest trading partner the annual trade growth rate is 22% in 2011-12. The trade stood at approximately \$ 76.53 Bn in 2014-15. The ASEAN India free trade agreement has been entering into force on July 1, 2015, ASEAN and India also want to cooperate in Put. Sectors engagement for promoting business ideas. There are several drawbacks in the current trade amongst the India and ASEAN which demands immediate attention and solution. The major export to ASEAN from India is meat, cotton, sugar, etc. China and Japan together supply 90% of steel, consumed by ASEAN countries. In this sector, India needs to give special attention.

Since the last decade, India has done well on all factors and has been termed as one of the emerging powers in the international politics. India is cooperating with Japan and South Korea and ASEAN in Asia Pacific Region. If we see Kautilya's Mandal Theory, these ASEAN countries are our friends against enemies as a common enemy. Still, China has bi-lateral relations with ASEAN countries but, there are still seeds of suspicion between them. In 1995, China and Phillipines had a difference over the Mischief Ref. islands in South China sea. The Island group has 36 islands in total on which China, Taiwan, Philipines, Vietnam and Brunei claims, the aggressive attitude adopted by China, like the demarcative Nine Dash line as its own territorial sea which is the violation of the UN law of the sea 1982. In 2016 Philipines took this matter to UN tribunal or law for sea. The tribunal ruled that this region belongs to all the countries claiming authority over it and it is not exclusive to China. But China refused to accept the decision.

South China sea is a major sea trade route in the world, the region has a great contribution to the economy of India. There is an annual trade of 5 lakh crores \$ through this route. India's 55% of the total trade is dependent upon this route, hence it is in the best interest of India that this navigation through the route is free and fair. The growing influence of China is threatening the free trade not only in India but also to other country as well.

The South East Asian Region is the world's most piracy affected region. Malakka Strait is a major choke point in this region which most sensitive from point of perspective. To counter this challenge, so many military and Joint Naval exercises, between India and ASEAN countries. Eg. Milan exercise, Malabar, SIMBEX, Garud. The other security challenge in this region is smuggling and drug and narco and human trafficking, illegal migration. The 'Golden Triangle' which includes Myanmar, Thailand and Laos is a global drug producers and exporter. The east generated from the sale of drugs is used to buy small arms. India and ASEAN, must need to work and act together as a combined force against such menace.

Arms which were smuggled into India through Golden Triangle are being purchased by Naxalist, Separatists and Mafia. The porous border between India and Myanmar is a soft gateway for smuggling. The border region is defense forest and mountain terrain. Porous border and insurgent condition are ideal for illegal migration, after doing illegal activity in India, insurgent flees away to neighboring countries. So India and Myanmar shall at together to solve much problems.

The main forum for ASEAN security dialogues is the ASEAN regional form. India has been attending annual meetings of this forum since 1996. The ASEAN's defence minister (ADMM) meeting is the highest defence cooperative mechanism in ASEAN. The ADMM + Brings together defence Minister's from ASEAN nations and Australia, China

India, Japan, Russia, USA, Russia. India and ASEAN could do cooperate in strengthening cybersecurity in the digital era. The governance of cyberspace for India and ASEAN should be decisive in Interregional cooperation for strengthening cycles security. it has become ever more important in the context of China's aspiration to influence the digital governance system.

In the East, Asia Summit 14 Nov. 2014, PM of India Narendra Modiji, changed 'Look East Policy' into 'Act East Policy'. "Since entering office 6 months ago, my Govt. has moved with a great sense of priority and speed to turn over 'Look East Policy' into 'Act East Policy". ASEAN nation does not wait their region to be used for Super Power Rivalry but the members of ASEAN do have concern over China's dominance.

In the current context, India needs to balance Chinese dominance, because India has already invested in South China Sea, which belongs to the Vietnam Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). ONGC Videsh Ltd. and Vietnam Petro Vietnam are working together, so India needs to be more active in its maritime policy towards this region. There is a lack of sub regional organization in India Ocean. Sub regional organization builds confidence amongst the member countries because they share common interest BIMSTEC launched in 1997 has not moved beyond changing its initiative. BIMSTEC could be beneficial for India's maritime Policy and security cooperation in India ocean lateral states.

In the East Asia Summit 2017 which was organized in Phillipines which 'QUAD' was mentioned which was to be constituted by India Japan, Australia, and USA. Quad is a strategic dialogue to counter growing Chinese influence in the Indo Pacific region and to promote free navigation in the sea. USA wants Australia to Joint Malabar exercise with India and Japan. Malabar exercise is an annual naval exercise between India, Japan, and USA.

While being part of QUAD, India needs to reassure ASEAN countries, that they shall receive adequate attention and just as before. On one hand India needs to maintain the healthy relationship with the USA and on the other hand, also have influence over South East Asia. By one belt one Road initiative, China developed port facility in Myanmar, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. China is deploying missiles launcher, naval ships in these ports which are threatening to India's security.

While taking into consideration the maritime security, India is constantly putting efforts for cooperation Indian Navy is increasing its capability both quantitative and qualitatively to counter growing Chinese influence. India which Vietnam has changed it is mature of partnership from just cooperation to a strategic partnership. India is providing Vietnam with military support it has shared the BRAHMOS technology. Under India's 'Make in India' policy, ASEAN countries have marketplace for its defence products, which in term is beneficial for India itself in reducing its current account deficit.

Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi at the 12th ASEAN Summit held on 14 Nov. 2014 emphasized upon naval sea movement. He also strained upon the autonomy/sovereignty of other countries, he indirectly challenged china too. In order to bring ASEAN countries more closer on 26 Jan. 2017. 'Shared Values, Common Destiny' theme was organized. Under which 28th Anniversary was celebrated. During the summit, cooperation and agreement were reached various topics mentioned below.

- A citizen to be Honoured with Padma Awards from each of 10 members states of ASEAN.
- 2019 to be celebrated as India ASEAN tourism year.
- India to provide fellowship to 1000 research scholars of ASEAN.

- Delhi Declaration, for joint action against terrorism.
- Emphasis to follow the 1982 maritime Law for the India ASEAN academic region.
- India announced to provide 1 Lakh Crore credit for ASEAN connectivity 2025 as well as far the Ice master plan.
- India and Cambodia to improve and co-operate
- In the cultural area, and stop human trafficking.

India and ASEAN have proved to be time-tested partners providing opportunities for collaboration are immense keeping in view that India's "Act East Policy" is playing a positive role in building a robust relationship with ASEAN countries. This will prove to be a successful example for foreign policy furthermore in the countries located in India Ocean

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