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UGC-HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT CENTRE
Gujarat University, Ahmedabad-380009, Gujarat, India



INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY: A TRANSFORMATION FROM 'LOOK EAST' TO 'ACT EAST' POLICY

Prof. Dr. Mukesh H. Khatik

Ms. Upasna Bhandari

ABSTRACT: India's look east policy did not start in 1990 but it existed long before India's relation with eastern neighboring countries since the 12th and 13th century, this is the first phase and second phase when the British comes in India, they give strong strategic dimension by the British empire in India, during the second phase when India become independent, Nehru did the third phase by focusing on east Asia as an important part of India's policy for Asian region. Nehru's vision of closer ties with the east was shaped by the strength of India's geopolitical proximity of historical experiences. Cultural identity, economic interest, and common strategic concerns in relation to the countries of the east. The vast stretch of Indian ocean and its economic strategic significance in links with eastern neighbors was not lost on Nehru and his associates since 1992, India started giving importance to South and South East Asian Countries in order to expand its trading activities. These countries have been considered as important trading destinations besides the U.K. and other European countries. The Government of India has started taking serious steps towards promoting Look East Policy. India has developed various bilateral and multilateral trade relations with these countries. The bilateral trade relations Indo-china, Indo-Myanmar and Indo-Sri Lanka and multilateral trade relations with India and South East Asian countries through BCIM, BIMSTEC, SAFTA, ASEAN and ASEAN Regional Forum are significant.

Geographically these South East Asian countries are connected continentally with the North Eastern States with maximum of their borders sharing with these countries. In order to take the maximum advantage of India's Look East Policy, there is a need to bring all round development of these North Eastern States.

KEY WORDS: Foreign policy, look east, act east, Asian, Indo-pacific, regional security, geopolitical etc.

INTRODUCTION:

In the era of liberalization, privatization, and globalization for the promotion of export and import of the country, there is a need for the diversification of trade destinations. Historically, India had close trade relations with the U.K. Besides the U.K., U.S.A., Canada, Russia, Japan and OPEC countries were important trading partners for India. With the rise of Southeast Asian

economies in the recent decades, India felt the need for the diversification of its trade direction towards the eastern side i.e., East Asia and Southeast Asia. With the potential of a vast market in East Asia and Southeast Asia, India started realizing the need to have closer economic ties with these countries.

The then Prime Minister, Shri P.V. Narasimha Rao was responsible for launching this policy known as Look East Policy in the year 1992. So, it is not a new thing. Look East Policy is nothing but the pursuit of a vigorous economic policy with ASEAN and the East Asian countries with Alienation content. After the initial thrust given by Narasimha Rao, all the subsequent governments have also supported this policy and extended all possible support to build on it. The last BJP led NDA and Congress led UPA governments have been fully supporting this policy.

An analysis of the first five year of India act east policy (AEP) calls for holistic approach and its area global and regional context. Its multiple factors as well as the past it stems from and its future it strives towards.

AEP operator in tandem with India's domestic politics these five years witnessed a sharper focus on the north east link as a weak north eastern potentiality factor the effectiveness of AEP there has been an effort to create greater political visibility of the central leadership to make the BJP'S presence in the state through the people mandate and trigger a massive outflow funds at a time when insurgency was breathing its last, this implies that in its evolution from looking to acting to east. The policy has become concentrated on the local context it is rooted in and its harnessing those rules to strengthen its effectiveness. The AEP also multi-faceted and attempts to innovatively branch into the sphere of and strategy on the economic front, it looks towards improving trades, investment, and connectivity and moreover, it goes beyond traditional aspects of scientific and technological corporation. This policy has other factors also like economic engagement with Asian and eastern Asian countries, Asian trades. Economic relation ties the bind, BCIM forum enhancing connectivity for Mekong India economic cooperation and sub regional diplomacy, India Myanmar policy implication for north east India.

The focus of the "Look East Policy " was to increase economic integration with the south east Asian countries and the area was just combined to south east Asia only. On the other hand, the focus of the "ACT EAST POLICY" is economic and security integration and focus area increased to south east Asia plus east Asia this policy continuous till the formation of NDA government in 2014 since the formation of new government in the center, the government upgraded to "Act East Policy" the act east policy was launched at the east Asian summit in Myanmar in November 2014.

Key differences between Look east policy and Act east policy-

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THE OBJECTIVE OF “ACT EAST POLICY”:

- 1) Promote economic cooperation, cultural ties and develop strategic relationships with countries in the Asia –pacific region through continuous engagement at regional bilateral and multilateral levels.
- 2) To increase the interaction of the north- eastern Indian state with other neighboring countries.
- 3) To find out the alternatives of the traditional business partner like, more focus on the pacific countries in additional to the south East Asian countries.
- 4) To curb the increasing impact of China in the ASEAN region.
- 5) Experts says that under the “Act East Policy” the government is helping on 3 c’s (culture, connectivity, and commerce) develop better relationship with ASEAN nations in order to ensure the success of the policy, NDA government is concerted on Indian north east state with the Asian region through people to people contact, trade culture and physical infrastructure ((airport, road, power telecommunication etc.) some of the major project include Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project, the Indian – Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway project, border Haats and Rhi-tiddim Road project etc.

In 2014 the LEP change into ACT and shifted to the act east policy (AEP) the global security and economic environment too are significant change with the USA taking back seat, china’s aggressive position and the belt, road initiative (BRI) coupled with the emerging geopolitical construct of Indo-Pacific the regional stake holder such as a ASEAN, USA, JAPAN, AUSTRALIA AND INDIA are the yet to form a unbind stand on the Indo-Pacific concept as well as a regional security architecture. The AEP appropriately fits into the current scenario as India is set to take up a larger role in the regional security environment while keeping the centrality of ASIAN intact. new Delhi seeks to create a platform for mutual development in the Indo-Pacific and engage with likeminded nation’s in the quest for rules-based order that promotes transparency respect for sovereignty and international law, stability and free and fair-trade framework, India and Asia can be a partner in the Indo-Pacific to play a constructive role and build a regional order.

“INDO-SPACIFIC” AS A GEOPOLITICAL FRAMEWORK:

Since 2014 when prime minister Narendra Modi revitalized act east policy his provided policy ballast to the Indo-Pacific concept in 2015 the Indian navy promulgated its new maritime security strategy, which expanded India’s area of maritime interest to the entire pacific ocean .India recent involvement in the quadrilateral.(AUSTRALIA,INDIA,JAPAN,AND US)there are call from the Indian strategic community for new Delhi to demonstrator a greater commitment to implement its act east policy and even broaden the scope of Modi vision of sagar (security and growth all in the region) tandem with Act East policy influence an “Indo-Pacific”. India was originally conceived in 2006-07 geopolitics must be about establishing a sphere of influence; therefore the Indo-Pacific as a geopolitical construct will necessarily involve such competition. While the us seeks to maintain its influence in the region in face of the Chinese challenge, it also seeks to prop up India influence east wards of the Malacca

India’s relationship with Indonesia, too, has strengthened with the AEP. India has identified several areas of cooperation with Indonesia, like joint aerial maritime cooperation along the Six Degree Channel; R&D in missile technology and UAVs; space cooperation; and engagement in policy dialogue with think-tanks. Some common areas of concern regarding the Indo-Pacific

region can be seen in Indonesia's Global Maritime Fulcrum Policy and India's SAGAR policy, along with participation in the Milan exercises. New Delhi upgraded its strategic-level partnership with Jakarta to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership during the Indian PM's visit in May 2018. Going further, India feels the need to widen shipping agreements with Indonesia.

It has identified several new spheres of engagement, has faced, and continues to face various hurdles, and has endured strong competition from China. To understand how these have taken place, specific project examples from the five-year period, and a few from the period prior to 2014, can be used. In the last five years, India has made the most progress through its procedural engagements, especially with ASEAN countries. Two of the most prominent developments in this are the appointment of a separate Indian ambassador to ASEAN in Jakarta, and the establishment of a dedicated MEA division to ASEAN multilateralism. India also made an important diplomatic overture by inviting the ten ASEAN heads of state for the Republic Day celebrations in 2018, which also marked the 25th anniversary ASEAN-India dialogue relations. While all of these are important developments, the focus here was more on process rather than delivery.

THE NAUTICAL DIMENSION OF INDIA'S "ACT EAST" POLICY:

India hopes to contribute to the restoration of strategic balance in the maritime neighborhood. India's nautical interactions in the Pacific are characterized by an increasing emphasis on naval exercises and capacity-building programs.⁸ While New Delhi has moved to expand its strategic military links with littoral states like Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam, its Navy-to-Navy interactions have also sought to generate greater operational synergy with Japan and Australia, bringing greater stability to the power balance in maritime Asia. for the purchase of 10 patrol boats and a project for the modernization of the Vietnam Navy's Petya class frigates.⁹ Besides allowing the Indian Navy to train Vietnamese submarines crews (for six new Kilo-class submarines acquired from Russia), New Delhi is said to be considering the sale of the Akash "Surface to Air" missiles to the Southeast Asian state, with a deal for a transfer of the BrahMos cruise missile awaiting clearance.¹⁰ In return, Hanoi has permitted Indian warships to utilize its port facilities and also granted the Indian oil firm ONGC Videsh a two-year extension to explore a Vietnamese oil block in an area of the South China Sea contested by China and Vietnam.¹¹ The India-Indonesia maritime relationship too has witnessed a significant upswing in the form of increased military delegation visits and training exchanges. The Indian Navy has upgraded its coordinated patrols outside the Strait of Malacca to a full-fledged naval exercise and it is now an expanded version of the original format.

Singapore is India's closest maritime partner in the eastern neighborhood. For a long time, the Singapore-India Maritime Exercise (SIMBEX) has been the Indian Navy's most productive maritime engagement in Southeast Asia. Besides upgrading the scope and complexity of individual exercises, India and Singapore have sought to enlarge the scope of SIMBEX beyond its traditional emphasis on anti-submarine operations.¹³ The 2017 iteration of the exercise explored other areas of operational cooperation, including advanced naval warfare drills, air defense exercises, and gunnery live-firings, even witnessing the maiden participation of Singapore's F-15SG fighter.¹⁴ Indian warships also joined in the Singapore Navy's Golden Jubilee celebrations, participating in both the inaugural International Maritime Review at Changi Naval Base and the International Maritime Defense Exhibition and Conference.¹⁵ in the South

China Sea.¹⁶ In another setback, India's state-owned Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers failed to secure a contract to supply two light frigates to the Philippines despite emerging as the lowest bidder¹⁷, following which maritime outreach to Manila has been confined to maintaining regular interaction. A goodwill visit by two Indian warships to Manila in October 2017 commemorating 25 years of the India-ASEAN dialogue partnership illustrates New Delhi's desire to remain engaged with this important Southeast Asian power.¹⁸ While Indian naval ships have been regularly visiting Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur has been balancing maritime relations between India and China (made evident by the docking of a Chinese submarine in Sabah in January 2017).²¹ Lest its naval engagements in the Western Pacific be perceived as tacit alliance building against China, the Indian Navy has stressed the benign

A POTENTIAL COALITION OF DEMOCRATIC POWERS:

Despite consciously steering clear of contentious issues such as the South China Sea disputes, New Delhi's frequent references to freedom of navigation and peaceful resolution of disputes in joint statements and vision documents have created misgivings in China, where political analysts believe India is being lured into a coalition of democratic powers against Chinese interests. China's naval watchers have been suspicious of naval exercises involving India, Japan, Australia, and the US, ostensibly aimed at balancing Chinese maritime power in the Asian littorals.²⁴ China's principal objection has been to the expansion of India-US naval ties. An abiding symbol of warming strategic ties between New Delhi and Washington, the Malabar naval exercise is the most wide-ranging professional interaction the Indian Navy has with any of its partner navies. Since Japan's inclusion as a permanent member in 2015, Malabar has grown in scope and complexity, with the 2017 edition witnessing the participation of two aircraft carriers, guided missile cruise ships, destroyers, submarines, Poseidon P-8A / P-8i aircraft, and Japan's new helicopter

The extension of pan-Asian integration led to the initiation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) in 2012. RCEP is a convergence of ASEAN's plus-one-FTAs of the six founding members of the East Asia Summit; the ten ASEAN countries; and India, Japan, Korea, Australia, New Zealand, and China. While it is often believed that the RCEP is led by China in reality, it has always been ASEAN-centric, with the layer's neutrality and dynamics with individual partner countries acting as the central components. Many considered RCEP to reflect India's commitment towards the AEP, through a concretization of actions leading to a greater regional economic presence and credibility. India's participation would have showcased the policy's dedication towards pan-Asian integration, thus highlighting its role as a relevant part of the Indo-Pacific as well.

ACT EAST IN PRACTICE - GAINS, HURDLES, AND COMPETITION:

How has the AEP fared in practice over the past five years? It has identified several new spheres of engagement, has faced, and continues to face various hurdles, and has endured strong competition from China. To understand how these have taken place, specific project examples from the five-year period, and a few from the period prior to 2014, can be used. India's engagements under the AEP can be classified into three spheres: tangible, procedural, and prospective. While several initiatives have been undertaken, their progress is mostly limited. India has pitched digital connectivity as a flagship programme under the AEP with an eye on stronger prospective engagement. Under this, New Delhi offered a line of credit (LoC) worth US\$ 1 billion in 2015 but no ASEAN country took to the offer. India then narrowed it down to

CLMV countries and provided a grant of US\$ 40 million in 2018. Here, too, it encountered limited success.

This begs the question: Why have India's overtures within the AEP found limited success? The answer lies in the policy hurdles that continue to face.

Hurdles:

India is seen as having an institutional capacity problem, which is a combination of confusion, non-responsiveness, and lack of delivery. In the context of the AEP, two examples enunciate this hurdle. The first concerns India's digital connectivity grant to CLMV countries, within which Laos had sent formal requests for projects under the credit line. But no progress was made as EXIM Bank, the disbursement agent, had no telecom consultant on its panel. This highlights the confusion and non-responsiveness demonstrated by India. The second example is the Kaladan Multimodal Project which illustrates New Delhi's lack of delivery. This US\$ 484 million project was initiated in 2003 with a deadline of 2014-15. The project is reportedly in its final phase now and is scheduled to be completed in 2020-2021. India's recent engagement on the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD or Quad) highlights the lack of political will. While the Quad is not part of the AEP, it is an important aspect of New Delhi's engagement in Southeast Asia. The Quad meeting in November 2019, three of the four member countries brought out press releases on the subject. The US and Australia mentioned the "Quad," which India refrained from. Instead, it chose to term it as "India-Japan-United States-Australia consultations." This showcases both India's reluctance to demonstrate active participation, as well as a lack of coherence within the Quad.

Competition:

China is seen as India's primary competitor in Southeast Asia, with India occupying the 'challenger' position. However, India seems to be no match for China's regional engagement. As of November 2016, China, and India's trade with ASEAN amounted to US\$ 345 billion and US\$ 58 billion respectively, or a 7:1 ratio. Additionally, Beijing's project implementation capacity is better than New Delhi's. The Chinese-initiated China-Myanmar Crude Oil Pipeline project, with a length of 793 km, was commissioned in 2009 and operationalized in 2015. This project is in the vicinity of India's Kaladan Multi-Modal Project. Further, under Beijing's big-ticket Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) ASEAN is estimated to have signed projects worth US\$ 737 billion.

India as Balancer?

Today there is an imbalance in the power struggle between the US and China. The US provides its partners with security and market access, and China provides its partners with money and project implementation. This creates a gap that middle powers like India can seek to fill. New Delhi's ability to provide these four elements, albeit in a limited way, makes it a supplementary power, rather than a balancer.

CONCLUSION:

Even though it is too early to presume that the Look East policy is a failure, sceptics argue that there is more rhetoric than substance in the policy. With the Northeastern region filled with armed insurrections and the subsequent law and order problem, the implementation of various developmental projects is an arduous task. However, such hindrances must not stop the pursuit for economic development. The government of India needs to actively engage with the insurgent groups for political dialogue striving for a peaceful solution to the decade's old problems of the

region. They also need to simultaneously go ahead with the development projects. There is also an ardent need to give a role to the Northeastern states in this policy. Thus, the success of the policy depends on the commitment of the Indian government to implement the proposed plans and projects under the policy and to give a role for the Northeastern states in this policy. In its first months since assuming office, the Modi Government has signaled its intention to pursue serious engagement with the Asia-Pacific and priorities high-level interactions with China, ASEAN, Singapore, Vietnam, Japan, and Australia. Modi's overwhelming electoral victory has not only afforded his government the opportunity to pursue a serious strategy in the Asia-Pacific but has enhanced the perception of India as an attractive security partner in the region. Deeper engagement with the region will align with Modi's intentions to revitalize Indian economic growth and carve out a more prominent global role for India. In addition, prioritizing relations with India's East and Southeast Asian partners will fulfill India's broader strategic objectives of balancing against China's increasing presence in the Indian Ocean. China's assertive stance in its border dispute with India and maritime territorial disputes in the Asia-Pacific is increasing the relevance of a stronger Indian presence in the region. If it can carefully manage Chinese sensitivities, cautious Indian engagement has the potential to act as a stabilizing force in the region. India under Modi will likely pursue a more ambitious role in East and Southeast Asia centered on practical partnerships with Japan, Vietnam, and Australia, and multilateral engagement with ASEAN. India's partners in the region can expect greater Indian involvement in multilateralism.

China Sea, India hopes to contribute to the restoration of strategic balance in the maritime neighborhood.

Consequently, India's nautical interactions in the Pacific are characterized by an increasing emphasis on naval exercises and capacity-building programs.⁸ While New Delhi has moved to expand its strategic military links with littoral states like Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam, its Navy-to-Navy interactions have also sought to generate greater operational synergy with Japan and Australia, bringing greater stability to the power balance in maritime Asia.



Source: https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map_of_southeast_asia.htm

Table 1: The Indian Navy’s Growing Deployments in the Asia Pacific Region (2013-2017)

| Year | No. of Deployments | No. of Countries visited in Asia Pacific | No. of Ships |
|------|--------------------|--|--------------|
| 2013 | 1 | 4 | 4 |
| 2014 | 4 | 7 | 6 |

| | | | |
|------|---|----|----|
| 2015 | 4 | 9 | 7 |
| 2016 | 6 | 17 | 15 |
| 2017 | 6 | 17 | 17 |

Source: Compiled by author using data from Ministry of Defense, Government of India Annual Reports (2013-2016), and the Indian Navy website (www.indiannavy.nic.in/search/node/act%20east)

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Prof. Dr. Mukesh H. Khatik
Head of Department Political Science
Gujarat University Ahmedabad, Gujarat

mukesh_khatik24@yahoo.co.in

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Ms. Upasna Bhandari
M.A. Political Science, Gujarat University

Email: upasanalal2009@gmail.com