

CHANGING DYNAMICS OF INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY: AN OVERVIEW FROM LOOK EAST TO ACT EAST

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ABSTRACT

The global political landscape has changed dramatically since the early 1990s. The changing dynamics of domestic and international politics have pushed India to demonstrate and pursue the "Look East Policy" (LEP) in 1991 by Prime Minister Narasimha Rao's government with the aim of developing economic, political and forging security cooperation with countries of South East Asia. The Look East policy's core premise is that India must find its fate by connecting more and more with its ASEAN partners and that increased political integration with Southeast Asia is beneficial for India's economic interests. This paper aims to examine India's foreign policy and strategic interests toward Southeast Asian countries which are perceived to be more assertive in general in recent years. The vast expansion of China and its strong intention to have ties with Southeast Asian countries are carefully observed by India. The competition is gradually increased for India as China approaches the ASEAN countries in Asia for energy and trade. The methodology of the paper is descriptive and analytical which will critically reveal India's Look East and Act East Policy in different ways.

Keywords: Foreign Policy, Look East, Act East Policy, ASEAN, Southeast Asia

I. Introduction

Foreign policy is a guiding force of any country which drives the relationship of one state with the others states. In simple terms, it's a framework within which Government maintains its relationship with the outside world. Foreign policy is a complicated political process and policy formulation that is determined by a diversification of factors such as national interests, leadership quality, political system type, and international settings and power balances, all of which play a significant role in establishing international relations. During the process of creating and implementing a policy, a number of interactive processes such as cooperation, conflict, neutrality, and coexistence emerge. In the current international security environment, the study of foreign policy-making has become an important field of study. In international relations, foreign policy and its various mechanisms become intangible elements that process interaction between countries into an understandable and implementable structure. Foreign policy is defined as an official activity formulated and carried out by "authorized agents of sovereign states as commitments, plans orientations, and actions directed" at the states' external conditions. This is accomplished through concrete objectives that guide policymakers in making decisions that

are in the best interests of the country. Foreign policy is based on the concept of interests as policy goals, and it encourages all states to follow certain norms, ideologies, and principles.

In contemporary times, no country can live in isolation, even before the interdependence of states reached the present stage. Every state has to protect its national interests and must establish economic, social, political, scientific, and cultural ties with other countries. The truth is that establishing relations with other countries has become an essential function of every state, and the policy adopted by a state in order to determine its relations with others while protecting and promoting its national interests is referred to as foreign policy. (Khanna: 1997)

II. A Sketch of India's Foreign Policy

India has been interacting with the rest of the world since ancient times. Scholars and travellers have written about it. During the national movement, Nehru had a clear picture of how he wanted to interact with the rest of the world. As a newly independent country, India placed a high value on international engagement. India's foreign policy objectives, as stated in the constitution of India Article 51 " to promote international peace and security," "maintain just and honorable relations

between nations," "foster respect for international law and treaty obligations in the dealings of organized peoples with one another," and "encourage settlement of international disputes by arbitration"(Nanda, 2012).

India's foreign policy after independence reflected the culture and political traditions of the country. Its largely moulded by the ideals of our freedom struggle, Gandhian philosophy, and the Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam principle, which is a fundamental principle of Indian tradition (the world as one family). Nehru's personality made a significant contribution to India's foreign policy. The domestic environment, which reflects communal, caste, regional, and linguistic differences, continues to dominate policymaking in India. India's neighbour is constantly attempting to destabilize the country (Hall,2018). Indiashares a large common border with China, with whom India continues to have a long-running border dispute. India's policy was also heavily influenced by cold war politics.

India's foreign policy attempts to safeguard the country's political autonomy while also enhancing its security from outside. As a former colony, India naturally wishes to pursue a foreign policy that does not jeopardize its independence or allow other countries to dictate its behaviour. With the support of a well-executed foreign policy, India hopes to avoid or counter foreign military threats. To put it another way, it does not want other countries to be insecure while it works to ensure its own. India has always wished for friendly relations with all nations, particularly with the world's superpowers and those in its immediate vicinity. In a nutshell, "India's foreign policy aims to promote world peace and prevent dangerous wars like the two world wars that occurred in the first half of the twentieth century" (Gupta,2007).

India seeks to promote peace and cooperation among countries that disagree ideologically, politically, and in other ways. As a State that was colonized and only gained independence after a long time, Indian foreign policy is aimed at ending colonialism around the world. As a matter of fact, it has backed African and Asian peoples in their fight for independence. "India has been interested in directing its

foreign policy toward the realization of equal rights for all peoples and nations without discrimination as a continuation of this goal". As a result, India opposed South Africa's abhorrent 'apartheid policy' and "sought to protect the right to equality under the law for all people of Indian origin", regardless of where they lived. Another important goal of India's foreign policy is "to promote the economic development" of underdeveloped countries and their people. Consequently, India's foreign policy aims to establish mutually advantageous relationships with industrialized states in order to secure necessary help. India's foreign policy aims to meet the development needs of both its own country and the "newly independent poor countries of the third world". India's foreign policy has long aimed for a "more equitable economic and social world order" that would aid in the eventual elimination of disease and deprivation. It's also worth noting that India's foreign policy goals are guided by a few admirable principles.(Swami & Swami, 2019).

In resolving differences with other countries, India has made an effort to avoid using force whenever possible. India has always been a strong proponent of the development of international law to address a variety of global issues. India has long advocated for the UNO and other global and regional organizations to be strengthened as tools for international harmony and cooperation. "The imperatives of non-aggression, non-interference and peaceful coexistence among countries are emphasized in India's foreign policy principles", as enshrined in Panchsheel (1954). Through its foreign policy, India aspires to be recognized as a "peaceful, mature, law-abiding, and trustworthy country", while also attempting to advantageof friendly relations with other countries in the international community.

III. Analysis of India's Look East Policy

During Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao's tenure, India's Look East Policy was initiated (or rather re-vitalized). Previously, India's political ties with these countries were limited because it supported the NAM while most East Asian countries sided with the US and some towards USSR. In order to protect its 'nascent' industries, India adopted an inward-oriented

economic policy and did not engage with the outside world, while these countries pursued free-market policies. After the fall of the USSR and India's adoption of economic reforms in 1991, it grew closer to these countries, which saw India as an important counterbalance to China, which had emerged as the region's dominant player. Indo-US ties improved significantly over the years after 2001, bringing India closer to these countries on a diplomatic level as well (Das & Thomas, 2016).

In the year 1991, the Prime Minister of India Shri P.V. Narasimha Rao was responsible for launching the Look East Policy. Subsequently, it is not a new phenomenon. Look East Policy is nothing more than the pursuit of a robust economic policy with ASEAN and East Asian countries that has an 'Asianization' component. After Narasimha Rao's initial push, all subsequent governments have backed this policy and offered all possible assistance to build on it. The previous BJP-led NDA and congress-led UPA governments backed this policy wholeheartedly. "India's Look East Policy is not merely an external economic policy, it is also a strategic shift in India's vision of the world and India's place in the evolving global economy," said then PM Manmohan Singh. As a result, innumerable bilateral and multilateral agreements were signed, laying the groundwork for India's growing relations with Southeast Asian countries in particular, as well as with countries outside of the region in general. (Singh: 2014)

The beginnings and evolution of the LEP were to be done with a lot of fanfare and rigour, even though it was not to be smooth sailing all the way. Look East Policy increase India's cultural, economic, political, and defence cooperation with East Asian and South-East Asian countries. This is because, following the disintegration of the USSR and the oil crisis in the gulf war, India's political and economic position adversely affected international affairs. One of the primary objectives of this policy was to strengthen India's ties with ASEAN countries. Building strong ties with ASEAN will lead to more productive international support for the United Nation. Because of regional disputes in the "South China Sea", most ASEAN countries are

opposed to Chinese foreign policy. As a consequence, India's defence cooperation and assistance can both strengthen Indian foreign policy and counter China's string of pearls strategy. It has the potential to boost India's arms exports and defence manufacturing. Developing India's North-Eastern states, which serve as an entry point for ASEAN members. As a result, the key goals of development in the North-Eastern states are industrial development and connectivity. The trilateral highway connecting India, Myanmar, and Thailand exemplify the preceding statement.

In terms of economics, India-ASEAN relations have gained unstoppable momentum. The trade between India and ASEAN has surpassed \$80 billion. The creation of a free trade zone for goods in 2009 was a major change, and the two sides are currently negotiating a free trade deal for services and investment between India and ASEAN. The two sides expect commerce between India and ASEAN to reach \$100 billion by 2015. One of the initiatives India has taken to strengthen relations with this economically vibrant area is the decision to build an ASEAN-India Centre for Trade and Investment, as well as the creation of an Indian delegation to ASEAN in Jakarta. While commerce and investment remain central to India-ASEAN relations, the two countries have started up new channels for collaboration on "cross-cutting security problems, providing bilateral relations with the strategic depth" they require (Rozman & Liow, 2017). The simmering disputes in the South China sea gave the strategic dimension of the relationship a new sense of urgency. "Connectivity is the overriding theme as India expands its diplomatic, economic, and cultural" relationships with the rest of the world. India has pushed for the expediting of a slew of connectivity projects that will fasten regional integration, as well as the ASEAN Plus connectivity master plan (MPAC).

Despite the fact that ASEAN ties are given a high priority, some challenges remain. In comparison to China, India has limited access to the ASEAN region. With the proposed India Myanmar Thailand (IMT) trilateral highway, this is set to change. In addition, the ASEAN nations have a negative perception of India due to its slow construction pace. India's North-

Eastern Region, which has been widely overlooked, has emerged as a crossroads for trade with the ASEAN region. The government has been unable to determine the level of exposure it wants to give its remote northeast through connectivity projects aimed at bridging the gap between South Asia (as it relates to North-East India) and East Asia. The aggressive behavior of China in the South China Sea, as well as its into the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), should be considered, and appropriate countermeasures developed to limit Chinese influence in the region. The transformation of Chinese economy in the context of geopolitics and geoeconomics is a significant example of technological development. In comparison to India, China's rise shook the World order (Lal, 2016).

IV. From Look East To Act East Policy

In 1991, particularly during the balance of payment crisis and the end of the Cold War, the ASEAN region was given strategic significance and designated as a pivot for the "Asia Pacific". The 'LEP' was developed and implemented in 1991 as a result of this renewed importance. It can be considered one of India's successful policies, having been started by P.V. Narasimha Rao, continued by Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Manmohan Singh, and Narendra Modi has brought to new heights.

Sridharan argues "India's look east policy refers to the country's efforts to develop extensive economic and strategic ties with Southeast Asian countries in order to strengthen its position as a regional power" for a counterweight to the People's Republic of China's strategic influence. He further stated that "The look east policy was expected to contribute significantly to India's efforts in globalization and integration with the world economy to fill the void left by the collapse of the Soviet Union, its major trading partner; and help India overcome its isolation from a global phenomenon of joining regionalism" (Sridharan, 2001).

Since 1991, the Look East Policy has gone through two phases. Phase I lasted from 1991 to 2002, and the main focus was on re-establishing political and economic ties with ASEAN member countries. In 1992, India

joined ASEAN as "a sectoral dialogue partner", and in 1996, it became a "full dialogue partner"; In the same year, it also joined the "ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)". The LEP scope was expanded during phase II (2003–2012) to include "China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand". During this time, India was working to strengthen its trade ties with ASEAN. "Look East is no longer adequate; now we need act east policy," India's foreign minister stated emphatically. As a result, the 'act east policy' was implemented. India hoped to strengthen its economic ties with the region as part of the act east policy, but it also hoped to establish itself as a potential security balancer.

The 'Act East' Policy of India aims to strengthen economic and military ties with ASEAN countries and countries in India's eastern regions. Look East Policy was limited To Southeast Asia and was only intended to strengthen economic ties with Eastern countries. However, Prime Minister Narendra Modi "changed the Look East Policy to Act East Policy" in 2014. In November 2014, Prime Minister Modi formally announced the Act East Policy at the 12th ASEAN India summit and the 9th East Asia summit in Naypyidaw, Myanmar. The Act East Policy is important not only for economic ties with other countries but also for national security. It encompasses Both Southeast Asia and East Asia. China's string of pearls projects as well as the one belt one road initiative could be detrimental to India, so India must maintain good relations with both its neighbours and ASEAN countries.

China's construction of Gwadar port in Pakistan, Hambantota port in Sri Lanka, and Chittagong port in Bangladesh, among other things, are steps that could harm India in the future (Bhambri:1997). India's trade with ASEAN is worth nearly \$80 billion and is expected to reach \$200 billion in the future. India is not an ASEAN member but a partner. Good relations with ASEAN countries are vital for India's security and economic growth. India has signed free trade agreements with ASEAN countries to boost bilateral trade. Four of the ten ASEAN countries have maritime disputes with China, which is good

for India. On Republic Day 2018, India invited ASEAN heads of state, to strengthen bilateral ties. India is a member of Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). India has started the “Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project” to improve trade and transport between India and Myanmar. The Asian Trilateral Highway will connect India and Thailand via Myanmar. BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal) have signed a trade agreement for goods and vehicles among them (WGI, 2018). Despite the fact that official clearance of the agreement is still waiting, India and Bangladesh have commenced testing. The Indian government is taking steps to strengthen ties with countries like India approved USD 318 million loans for Sri Lankan railways and signed an agreement to supply electricity to Bangladesh. The Present government is trying to counter China's pearl policy, many projects are being built that will benefit India in the future. (Naidu, 2013)

V. Conclusion And Policy Suggestions:

India's main security concern is dealing with a more complex and competitive international situation. India needs new strategic and defence equations, wide-ranging economic and technological links with South Asian countries were required to keep India strong in the region. India should establish appropriate relations with the world's new power and influence centre to ensure its unity, territorial integrity, and prosperity. In order to maintain a positive security environment in South Asia, India must establish stable and friendly relations with its neighbors. To do so, reasonable compromises must be made on points of economic policymaking and give aid to neighboring countries. In this context, India's relations with China and resolving border disputes remain top priorities. In the case of ASEAN, India should gain access to emerging national and sub-national economic

and security arrangements, particularly those aligned with China's Belt Road Initiatives, to ensure its political, territorial, and economic security.

India's foreign policy goals are diverse and achieve a balance of regional and global interests. India has worked for “peace, freedom, progress, and justice for all nations and peoples” while pursuing its own security and socio-economic advancement. In the words of Wojczewski “Nonalignment, adherence to peaceful procedures for resolving differences, support for disarmament initiatives, and active participation in international bodies were among the notable principles that flowed from the country's foreign policy objectives.” There are two sides to India's foreign policy. One of India's advantages is that, unlike many other Third World countries, it is not a member of any imperialist alliance system. India is not a member of any anti-communist military or political bloc, such as the ASEAN countries, either formally or informally. India foreign policy's negative aspects stem from its domestic economic and social policies. (Wojczewski, 2016).

As aforementioned, among the many determinants of foreign policy, factors such as India's size, geography, historical experiences and customs, economic situation, political institutions and structure, and leadership style have all influenced the country's policies toward its neighbors and beyond. Furthermore, the impact of a changing global scenario—whether it be Cold War or post-Cold War political trends must be considered when analyzing “shifts in India’s foreign policy.” In the international arena, India appears to have done a decent job of establishing and implementing a foreign policy that has brought the country together and projected the country as a “peaceful, democratic, and law-abiding” nation.

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