

# Administrative Reforms in India

## Recent Trends and Issues

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# Look-East Policy: A New Dimension in Indian Foreign Policy and its Challenges Today

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## INTRODUCTION

When the Cold war ended and new international environment began to emerge with emphasis on liberalisation in economies even of countries like China, India was inspired to shift emphasis from public sector and partially economy to liberalisation, reduction of state control and encouragement to foreign investments in private and joint sectors. India also tried to accelerate resolution of its disputes with China, Bangladesh and even Pakistan. Thus international milieu had, and still has, its impact on the shaping of India's foreign policy.

The collapse of the former Soviet Union led to the resolution of the decade long Cambodian Crisis and the 1991 economic liberalization policy inaugurated by Narasimha Rao's government in India led to significant alterations in India-ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) relations. India, under Rao's government, embarked on substantive and wide-ranging programmes of economic reforms, restructuring and liberalization and thereby bringing the Indian economy in line with the economies of the ASEAN countries. India's decision to give a special policy thrust to its relations with the ASEAN and its desire to improve relations with individual countries in the ASEAN region and with ASEAN as a collective entity, "virtually obliterated its hitherto indifferent attitude to this regional organization". As a logical follow up, Rao's government designed a new policy initiative towards Southeast Asia which come under the umbrella of "Look-East Policy"

In the post-Cold War period, India and the countries of ASEAN were confronted by new security issues which opened up opportunities for cooperation. Notwithstanding the Balkan crisis which pitted the entire NATO against the former state of Yugoslavia, the end of the Cold War by eliminating the ideological bases of conflict between the two super powers - the United States and the erstwhile Soviet Union, lessened the chances of any conflict between the major powers, thereby removing any possible uncertainties in the strategic environment of Europe. In Asia - Pacific, the United States is the strongest power in terms of political, economic, technological and military capabilities, but that has not allowed it to determine the economic, political, security and other forms of interaction in the region unilaterally, specifically because of the existence of other powers, like Japan, China, Russia and India. These Asian powers may not have the wherewithal of power at the moment to challenge the supremacy of the United States but can deter its hegemonic role [1]

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands, which are strategically located near the Straits of Malacca, are geographically closer to the ASEAN members than India.

India signed maritime boundary demarcation treaties with Indonesia, Myanmar, and Thailand. Given the increasing salience of maritime trade and energy security for India, the safety of sea lanes of communication (SLOCs) in the ASEAN region is crucial. India has recognized that a peaceful and prosperous ASEAN that ensures free sea lanes between the Indian and Pacific oceans is in its best interests. Admiral Bhargava said: 'Look East' policy has its roots in Chanakya's 'Theory of six fold policy of relations' in his treatise 'Arthashastra' in the second century BC and his 'panchshekha'. [3]

India's Look East policy has provided an opportunity for its political leaders and policy-makers to develop common approaches to many issues of regional and international importance. India has actively involved in several high level meetings and summit meetings which have been extremely useful in networking and building trust and confidence among the partners. New Delhi's participation in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) is equally of great significance, for it enabled her entry into multilateral security deliberations outside the aegis of the United Nations for the first time and provided India and its defence establishments both at official and non-official levels, greater access to information. Furthermore, the ARF framework offered opportunity to develop proximity on strategic and security related issues. During the last ten years, India participated in a number of ARF activities related to confidence-building measures (CBMs), maritime search rescue, peace making, non-proliferation, preventive diplomacy and disaster management. These exercises were found to be productive and useful for the facilitation of the introduction of appropriate CBMs among participants. India has a vital stake in the security of the Asia - Pacific region and the thrust for ensuring peace and disarmament at ARF discussions was viewed by India as an approach towards a "genuine pluralistic security order" [4].

## MAJOR CHALLENGES-CHINA

ASEAN's strategic relationship with India cannot be viewed in isolation from the grouping's relations with other external powers. Indeed, China's future role, interests, capabilities and influence are a major concern to India as they are to ASEAN. India is specifically concerned about China's standing in the international order-not only in its U.N. Security Council seat, but also about clout as a nuclear power. In both these dimensions, India sees itself as co-equal with China, and is at a loss to comprehend why China's role aspirations are acceptable while India's are not [5]. The rapid rise of Beijing's status as an economic superpower since the Deng's reforms of the late 1970's is having an impact upon ASEAN's perceptions of its immediate big power neighbour. The modernization of China's military, especially its naval capability, has enabled Beijing to adopt a more assertive if not aggressive posture in the South China Sea- which has been a matter of growing concern to ASEAN states such as Malaysia, Vietnam, Brunei, and the Philippines, all of whom have overlapping claims in the Spratlys chain. China's assertion of sovereignty and

willingness to use force to support its claims would provide additional incentives for regional players to engage Indian power to balance the power of the other Asian giant. Indeed, the manner in which the Taiwan issue is resolved is bound to affect ASEAN's perceptions of China although the regional grouping has preferred to view the Taiwan problem as an internal matter of China.

The evolving India-China relationship is another important aspect that can have a bearing on their relations with Southeast Asian countries. The India and China engagement has been a consistent and continuing affair. This was witnessed during former Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee's visit to China in 2003 and Prime Minister Wen Jiabao's visit to India in April 2005. The visit saw improvement of relationship between Asia's two largest neighbours in every front: political, economic, technological and cultural. An India - China Strategic and Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Prosperity was agreed upon. Importantly, this agreement recognizes the mutual desire to "resolve outstanding differences in a proactive manner without letting them come in the way of the continued development of bilateral relations" This pragmatism marks the adoption of new approach in the interaction between India and China. They have also agreed on the guiding principles to resolve the long-standing border dispute. On the economic side, the two have decided to make efforts to increase the trade volume to US \$20 billion by 2008 or earlier. They are also looking at the complementarily in mutual strengths between China's hardware and infrastructure and India's software. The statement made by Prime Minister Wen that "the results of the discussions will draw the attention of the entire world" and the statement by India's Prime Minister Man Mohan Singh that "India and China can together reshape the world order" [6] are instructive.

The emergence of China and India as major powers represents a major strategic shift in the region. "China and India, as rapidly growing powers, have thrown off their complexes, patched up their own relations, embarked on a buying spree and made the talk of the Asian century persuasive. Asia hums while America worries and Europe sleeps" [7]. The two have been leveraging their good equations with Southeast Asia within and outside the region. As a result, Southeast Asia should actually stand higher and gain more as China and India improve their bilateral understanding.

### MAJOR CHALLENGES-USA

The United States remains a major power significantly influencing the strategic equation in Asia. The continued strategic dominance of the United States is a major feature of regional security at the turn of the 21st century. As the sole superpower in strategic terms, the U.S will remain influential in shaping the broader picture of Asia-Pacific stability including South Asia and Southeast Asia, at least for the next decade, especially when security multilateralism in Asia is still resting on a weak foundation. However, this influence can be limited if not neutralized by conflicts of national interests between the United States, China and India with respect to the management of the Asian balance of power.

Arguably, the United States could do very little in "democratizing" China beyond Beijing's own political and cultural capacity. Where India is concerned, bureaucratic inertia presents a major problem for policy reform. India seems to move at a tempo of its own which may be quite out of step with western notions of productivity, pace and performance. China shares many of India's problems of internal governance: bureaucratic malaise, widespread corruption, regional assertiveness, and management of a huge population residing in a vast territorial expanse. China's population stands at nearly 1.3 billion, spread over a geographical area of 3,691,500 square miles, while India's population of little over one billion is spread over a geographical area of 1,261,810 square miles. New Delhi's and Beijing's preoccupation in addressing these issues would understandably leave less time and energy for a focused and effective foreign policy designed to enhance the military, political, and economic influence of these two Asian giants[8].

Secondly, India and China are both aware that America's post - Cold War strategy in the Asia-Pacific focuses on consolidating already established security linkages with Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, and ASEAN. The pillar of U.S. security policy in Asia will continue to be the U.S.-Japan security alliance entered into since 1951, which was given a new lease of life during President Clinton's visit to Tokyo in 1996. During the two day Clinton-Hashimoto summit (April 17-18, 1996), a nine-point joint document called the "Japan-U.S. Joint Declaration on Security Alliance for the 21st Century" was initialed, pledging Washington's commitment to keep 100,000 U.S. troops in the Asia-Pacific region, of which 47,000 are stationed in Japan. The Clinton Doctrine for Asia is firmly premised on the notion that the U.S. intends to be an active partner in Asia - Pacific stability, growth, and prosperity well into the 21st century, and will therefore remain fully engaged economically, militarily, and diplomatically. Such a strategy of "engagement" is viewed as crucial for preserving America's continued access and influence in a region with growing political, economic, and strategic impact on world affairs. New Delhi as much as Beijing will have to contend with this factor even as the two Asian powers develop a greater capacity to engage other key players in the region.

Thirdly, the post-Cold War strategic relationships among the major powers in the Asia-Pacific region - USA, China, Russia, India, and Japan - are characterized by low-level tensions arising from geopolitical uncertainties. The elements of change would tend to be governed as much by geo-economics as by geopolitical considerations - factors that would significantly influence power calculations in New Delhi, Beijing, Tokyo, Moscow, Washington, and even in many of the ASEAN capitals.

### COMMON CHALLENGES FOR INDIA AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

In South Asia, the scourge of terrorism has continued unabated for more than two decades with India having suffered the killings of thousands of innocent civilians in Jammu and Kashmir and elsewhere by Islamic extremists and the displacement of thousands of Muslims and Hindus from Jammu and Kashmir. Soon after 9/11,

India badly experienced terrorist attack on its Parliament building. In the long arc of the countries extending from Indonesia and the Philippines in Southeast Asia through South Asia to Russia and Europe and onwards to the United States, India has been a major target of Al-Qaeda-linked terrorist organizations. Terrorism is, therefore, a deep national concern and anguish in India.

In the post 9/11 phase, U.S. attention in Southeast Asia was focused mainly on the issue of terrorism, especially since "this region had seemed like a good candidate for the second front in the U.S. campaign"[9] Although the Islamic tradition in Muslim majority countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia is noted for tolerance and liberalism, in recent years the influx of Wahabbi ideology was seen to be promoting a fundamentalist brand of Islam even in such countries. The number of students and young persons from these countries and also from southern Thailand and Cambodia going to Pakistan to receive Islamic training in madrassas had been high till very recently. According to B.Raman, an Indian commentator, nearly 400 students from Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand were studying in the madrassas of Pakistan in 2002[10]. Since 2002, the Indonesian and Malaysian governments reportedly introduced restrictions on the number of students going to Pakistan to study imadarasas. The burning of the Myanmar embassy in Kuala Lumpur by a group of Rohingya Muslims allegedly in league with JI pointed to the activities of Islamic fundamentalists in Myanmar as well.[11] Cambodia and Myanmar, which are predominantly Buddhist countries, are particularly apprehensive of the spread of Islamic extremism among their Muslim minorities.

Cross-border terrorism has been witnessed on a large scale for attempting separation of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir through the use of force by Islamic extremists. Since the late eighties (when the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan ended), India had to face the main brunt of the well-armed Mujahiddeen and Taliban, many of whom were routed to Kashmir since the late 1980's. Through terrorist violence, numerous Islamic radical groups attempted to attack the basic foundation of India's secularism and democracy but failed miserably. India does not accept the argument that violence in the name of so-called "freedom fight" or jihad should not be treated as terrorism. On the other hand, it is of the view that violence against innocent civilians has no justification whatsoever and no distinct categorization. It is terrorism and has to be put down.

The interconnection of Jihadi terrorism between Southeast Asia and India is a matter of growing concern for both. There are reports that the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HUM), the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LET) and the Harkat-ul-Jihad-Al-Islam (HUJI) from Pakistan, which are assisting the Jihadi terrorist elements in Southeast Asia, are members of Osama Bin Laden's International Islamic Front (IIF). These groups have been responsible for most of the terrorist incidents in India since 1999[12].

Terrorism has become a major concern for Southeast Asian countries, though with varying intensity. Vietnam, Laos and Myanmar are relatively less affected by it whereas it is a priority issue for Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and the

Philippines. ASEAN has also entered into inter-regional co-operation with the United States, which has focused its attention on the issue of terrorism in the region and its linkage to Al-Qaeda.

Here, maritime concerns such as the safety of the sea lanes of communications, the energy security in the Bay of Bengal, the South China Sea and the Malacca Straits, piracy, transnational crime and arms trafficking, and environmental issues connected with maritime activity would be of common interest. Consequently, the roles of the navies and coast guard organizations will become more prominent. India is increasingly looked upon by the countries of archipelagic Southeast Asia as a nation with a potentially major navy that can play a useful role in the region.

### **BILATERAL AND MULTILATERAL AGREEMENTS**

Co-operation on the issues of mutual security concerns has grown in recent years. One of the main concerns for India is that insurgent groups from its northeast region have been using the Thai territory for the procurement and trans-shipment of arms and for anti-India activities. India and Thailand agreed to institutionalize security co-operation during Prime Minister Thaksin's visit to India in November 2001[13]. As a first step, it was decided to set up a Joint Working Group (JWG) on Security. The JWG held its first meeting in May 2003 in Bangkok. The JWG subsequently met in New Delhi during December 2003 and in Thailand during July 2004. This group periodically arranges for dialogue between Indian and Thai officials on issues such as narcotics, terrorism, arms trafficking and smuggling, money laundering, illegal migration and other transnational crimes.

Other initiatives in mutual security between these two countries include the signing of the Mutual Legal Assistance and Treaty in Criminal Matters in February 2004. The treaty was ratified in June 2004, and discussions are continuing on an Extradition Treaty and for an Agreement on Transfer of Convicted Prisoners. A penta-lateral group of five countries for co-operation has been set up for narcotics control which periodically discusses the questions relating to narcotics as well as help exchange information on under world narcotics trade. The five countries are Thailand, China, Laos, Myanmar and India. During the summit of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Co-operation (BIMSTEC) in 2004, it was decided to set up a Joint Working Group on Counter Terrorism and International Crime. This working group held its first meeting in December 2004.

A Joint Working Group was established between India and Singapore after the visit of former Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani to Singapore for addressing the issue of international terrorism and organized crime during March 2003. A Treaty on Mutual Legal Assistance in Civil and Criminal Cases was signed in New Delhi during June 2005 between India and Singapore. Besides, both have initiated discussions on an Extradition Treaty between them.

Historically India has had a benign and non - threatening contact with Southeast Asia. The misunderstandings and misperceptions in relation to India



during the Cold War years have been changing in recent years. In Southeast Asia, the opening up the Indian economy and the steady progress of India, especially in the technological field, is being felt for the past fifteen years. Singapore's Minister of State for Trade and Industry, Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, aptly stated that "India's growing renaissance seems unstoppable".[14]

Negotiations and peaceful methods have been generally employed to resolve disputes. However, this has not reduced the need for individual countries to have modernized and well-equipped armed forces. Defence requirements, including training, are met by member states bilaterally with other member states of ASEAN or with other non-regional powers. Membership of Defence arrangements such as the FPDA (Five Power Defence Agreement) or bilateral treaties which Thailand and the Philippines have with the United States enable them to partly meet their needs. Given India's well-developed defence capabilities, including its arms equipment production and training facilities at competitive costs, ASEAN member states and India could find close convergence in this vital field. That India and ASEAN states have no disputes or outstanding issues can be a contributing factor in this direction. So to compete with these challenges India has to take much effort through Look-East policy for the development of political, economic and security relations.

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