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# The Indian Journal of Political Science

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**C.P. Barthwal**



विद्या नाम नरस्य रूपमधिकं प्रच्छन्नगुप्तं धनं  
विद्याभोगकरी यशःसुखकरी विद्या गुरुणां गुरुः।  
विद्या बन्धुजनो विदेश गमने विद्या परम दैवतम्  
विद्या राजसु पूज्यते नहि धनं विद्यविहीनः पशुः॥

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## INDIA IN WORLD POLITICS: SPECIAL REFERENCE TO LOOK- EAST POLICY

D. Ramakrishnan

**Introduction:** 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. This did not happen in the case of Asia-Pacific which is home to some of the largest and key states of the world such as Japan, China, India, Indonesia, Korea, Russia and the United States within its ambit and where exist a series of sovereignty disputes and military issues leading to an uncertain and complex security environment. With the disintegration of the Soviet Union and on the successor state Russia's decision to abdicate its status by withdrawing from its commitment to security overseas as well as its desire to forge a link of active cooperation with the western powers, the United States has emerged as the only Super Power in the world.

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<sup>1</sup>. As other powers develop their economic and military capabilities in course of time and thus their leverage, there is the likelihood of a gradual decline of American predominance in the region and of growing prospects for the region to move slowly towards a polycentric system. But the process towards a polycentric system is not going to be smooth while new powers are

emerging in the context of a shifting strategic order. The region, therefore, has to create a new balance of power amidst conditions that are rapidly changing in terms of: (a) the disintegration of the Cold War-induced ideological, economic and political divide; (b) the dynamic growth of the region's economies in spite of the setback caused by the Asian economic turmoil and global recession, and (c) the resurgence in power of the regional states. All of these are creating a new environment that requires new structures of peace and stability. The strategic imperatives for cooperation arise from these uncertainties in the regional security environment.

Three out of the sixteen world maritime choke-points identified by the US Navy are spread across the waters of the ASEAN region. The Malacca Straits (between Malaysia and Sumatra), Sunda Straits (between Sumatra and Java), and Makassar Straits (between Borneo and Sulawesi) are passages between Indian and Pacific Oceans. These passages play a vital role in international commerce and maritime activities. They also play a decisive role during international conflicts as demonstrated during the Second World War. India naturally has a stake in the peace and stability of this region owing to its physical proximity. India cannot remain unmindful of the security concerns and power shifts in the Asia - Pacific<sup>2</sup>

With Myanmar becoming part of the ASEAN, India and ASEAN now share a land boundary. India shares maritime frontiers with three ASEAN members, viz. Indonesia, Thailand, and Myanmar. It also shares a long porous land border with Myanmar. Apart from this, it shares its exclusive economic zone (EEZ) with Malaysia. The presence of Indian Diaspora in the ASEAN region, especially in Malaysia and Singapore is another enduring bond. Thus India's security and prosperity are invariably linked to the well being of the ASEAN region.

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 straddles vital sea-lanes between the Indian and Pacific oceans is in its best interests<sup>3</sup>.

**Common Challenges for India and Southeast Asia:** In South Asia, the scourge of terrorism has continued unabated for nearly 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.

Southeast Asia, too, has suffered much from terrorism for several years. The atrocities committed by the extremist Abu Sayyaf group in the Philippines, the violence caused by the separatist Mindanao National Front (MNF), the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), and the inter-religious killings in the Maluku islands of Indonesia as a result of clashes between the Laskar Jihad and Christian groups are some of such notable incidents involving the terrorist outfits in this region. It has been reported that a renegade faction of MILF is harboring Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) militants and the leader of the Abu Sayyaf group<sup>4</sup>. This political violence in which thousands of innocent civilians have been killed is no different from terrorist violences perpetrated by the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) in Bali during October 2002 and September 2005, at the Jakarta Marriott Hotel in August 2003 and outside the Australian Embassy in Jakarta during September 2004. JI is the largest terrorist organization operating in five Southeast Asian countries—Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines. Founded in 1993, it had made its base in Malaysia when the Indonesian military during President Suharto's rule came down heavily on radical Islamic elements. Its activities were first discovered in December 2001

when the Singapore authorities unearthed a JI plot to attack the U.S., British and Israeli Embassies and U.S. naval vessels in Singapore. A White Paper issued by the Singapore Government in January 2003 brought this out in detail<sup>5</sup>.

The involvement of JI in the Bali and Jakarta bombings and its close links with Al-Qaeda were established with the arrest of JI's Amir Bashir and his deputy Hambali. Co-ordination and co-operation among the intelligence and enforcement agencies of the ASEAN countries has improved, and a series of agreements have been signed with a view to combat terrorism jointly. ASEAN has also signed a co-operation agreement with the United States to fight against terrorism.

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"<sup>6</sup>. 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.

**Counter-Terrorism Measures:** The urgent need to deal jointly with terrorism prompted India and ASEAN to enter into agreements to share information and to co-ordinate actions. During the several visits of the leaders of India and Southeast Asia since 9/11 incident, the terrorism issue has remained high on their agenda and have agreed on the need to share information on this issue. For such an arrangement to succeed and be effective, however, there has to be better knowledge and understanding of the intelligence systems, enforcement procedures and relevant legal provisions. While there is some common ground between India and Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei and Myanmar due to the common British colonial experience, the situation with respect to other countries in Southeast Asia is different.

Co-operation in combating terrorism can be facilitated if legal instruments, such as Mutual Legal Assistance Extradition Treaties (MLAET) and Agreements on the Transfer of Convicted Offenders (ATCO) exist between India and the ASEAN members. India and the Philippines agreed on an Extradition Treaty in March 2004<sup>7</sup>. It is significant that the two countries have expressed interest in sharing



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information and exchanging experience with regard to separatists or terrorist violence for some time. A Treaty on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters between Thailand and India was signed and ratified in 2004. With Singapore, the Treaty on Mutual Legal Assistance was signed during Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's visit to India in June 2005. This accord will help tackle terrorist organizations and their sources of funding<sup>8</sup>. Cambodia also believes that it may be useful for Southeast Asian countries to obtain the experience of India in dealing with global terrorism.

Maritime piracy has implications for security in the economic sphere. With nearly 100 attacks reported annually, Southeast Asia is considered as the most pirate-prone region of the world. In 1992, the London-based International Maritime Bureau (IMB) identified the sea route stretching from the northern trip of Sumatra through the Malacca Straits and the Philip Channel as the single most dangerous one in terms of piracy attacks<sup>9</sup>. This is the busiest sea route in the world. Maritime piracy in the Malacca Straits is a common threat to India and the ASEAN region. These sea-lanes are of enormous economic importance to all the states in the region as their economies are critically dependent upon sea borne trade and hence "an uninterrupted access to the Malacca Straits and the South China-Sea, vital for the economy of the ASEAN region and India needs to be ensured"<sup>10</sup>. They are also of vital strategic value to ASEAN economies owing to their dependence on oil supplies from the Middle East. India's global trade is dependent upon seaways; the safety of this particular sea-lane is of vital economic importance to India. With further expansion of sea-borne trade and growth of fishing and other activities in the EEZ (Exclusive Economic Zone), maritime safety is of crucial importance to India. In case of a major oil spill, the ecological balance of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands will be affected as they are located closer to the Malacca Straits.

India has taken important initiatives in recent years in the fields of maritime defence cooperation<sup>11</sup>. India, Myanmar, and Thailand signed a tripartite agreement on the determination of the tri-junction in the Andaman Sea in October 1993. Since 1995, India has hosted 'MILAN' - an annual get-together of friendly navies of the Bay of Bengal littoral states at Port Blair on the Andaman Islands, where naval

personnel from Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand interact with Indian Navy personnel. Though these events were essentially social, cultural and support get-togethers, this interaction provides a forum to foster friendship, strengthen cultural ties and promote confidence building amongst the naval fraternity of the region. The navies of India and ASEAN countries regularly undertake good will visits to each other's ports and also occasionally conduct joint exercises. The Indian Coast Guard and Navy have made significant contribution to the issue of anti-piracy by successfully intercepting and confiscating the hijacked Japanese vessel, MV Alondra Rainbow, in November 1999. India also hosted an ARF workshop on anti-piracy at Mumbai in October 2000. ASEAN defence officers are regular participants in the courses conducted by the National Defence College, New Delhi and the Defence Services Staff College (DSSC), Wellington. As part of the military training under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme, many slots are allocated to ASEAN states.

The Indian Navy and the Indian Coast Guard have offered to conduct surveillance missions and undertake joint patrols with ASEAN navies to boost maritime defence cooperation. India's joint services facility, known as FORTAN (Fortress Andaman & Nicobar), which is located only 80 nautical miles west of the straits of Malacca and the Indonesian island of Sumatra is capable of extending cooperation to the ASEAN efforts to check piracy activities as well as drug smuggling in the region. The Indian Coast Guard can offer training facilities to interested countries of the ASEAN Region. The Joint Declaration for the Co-operation to Combat International Terrorism signed by ASEAN and India in Bali in October 2003 reflects their determination to tackle non-traditional security issues as well.

The leaders from both sides have, thus, laid firm political foundation for partnership between India and ASEAN. Political leadership created an atmosphere of mutual trust and the level of comfort has been raised. Moreover, now political and security cooperation has been institutionalized by way of various forums. The leaders have been interacting on a more regular basis. The deep interest taken by the political leadership from both sides to forge a mutually beneficial relationship prepared the ground for greater economic engagement.



For Southeast Asia and India, terrorism with international links is not new. Both had been victims of fundamentalism of many sorts for a long time. Both had been fighting with resoluteness and determination the terrorists and separatists, who have been forcefully attempting to bring political change through violence in the peaceful and constitutionally governed societies of these nations.

**Issues on Energy Security:** Along with the growing population and rapid industrialization, a secure and adequate supply of food and energy throughout the country or a region is necessary. Energy is a vital input in modes of production for economic development. And thus, there is a need for energy security defined as the continuous availability of energy in varied forms in sufficient quantities at reasonable prices, to fuel economic growth<sup>12</sup>. India, however, is facing a serious challenge as energy consumption incessantly increases as India gears towards rapid economic growth. As the second fastest-growing energy market in the world, there is a need for India to maintain its annual growth rate of 8 percent to achieve its goal of totally eliminating poverty in the country<sup>13</sup>. As the world's eleventh largest energy producer and the sixth largest consumer, the domestic coal reserves of India account for 70 percent of its energy needs. The 30 percent remaining is met by oil with at least 65 percent being imported. Coal is the major source of energy in India; yet, its coal reserves cannot meet India's energy needs in the long term run.<sup>14</sup> Further, India's coal is of poor quality burdening the state with the environmental concerns of coal as the dirtiest hydrocarbon fuels. India's coal is also not appropriate for use in steel and other major industries thereby adding to the need for better and reliable coal source. India resorted to importing gas, which is considered as more environmental friendly, from neighbouring countries such as China, Iran and Myanmar. This is also to aid the growing deficit of gas availability in the country. The proven huge reserves of gas in Myanmar allows

South Korea's Daewoo International to operate and own 60 per cent of its gas-rich A-1 block, in which India's Oil and Natural Gas Corp. Ltd. holds 20 per cent stake, while GAIL India Ltd and Korea Gas Corp each hold 10 per cent. Myanmar later on appointed GAIL India Ltd responsible for the marketing of gas from the A-1 block. With this responsibility, pipelines installation is considered as an option for

India for the transportation and exploitation of gas reserves.<sup>15</sup> However, the trans-national nature of the pipeline project received strong domestic opposition in Bangladesh for the installation of the Myanmar-Bangladesh-India gas pipelines. Negotiations then played a significant role in reaching an agreement to allow the construction and the installation of the pipelines under certain conditions including the agreement to allow Bangladesh to use the pipeline to export its gas to India or import it from Myanmar. Extraction of gas reserves is not just a sole interest of India in Myanmar, but rather, it is one way of establishing an economic link with the ASEAN.

India eventually developed an integrated energy policy to ensure its energy security and to address the energy concerns of the country. Further measures include the improvement of the investment environment in energy reactors, enhancement of energy efficiency and saving, enhancement of domestic hydrocarbon reserves' exploration, building strategic oil reserves, reduction of energy poverty, and responding to the issues of climate change and sustainable development. In support of these measures, further actions were already taken such as the continuous construction and installations of trans-national pipelines and securing oil-navigation sea routes.<sup>16</sup> India's response towards sustainable development actually goes in harmony with the Regional Energy Policy and Planning in ASEAN for Sustainable Development which puts premium in achieving a clean and green ASEAN. ASEAN thereby aims at ensuring the protection of the environment, the sustainability of its natural resources, and the high quality life of its peoples. In this regard, activities such as gas extraction and pipelines installation of India to address its energy concerns, cannot fully guarantee the achievement of sustainable development that the ASEAN highly gives importance to. Nevertheless, India extracting gas from Myanmar, in one way or another, is a big help to Myanmar's economy. This development in Myanmar then, as a member-state of ASEAN could alleviate the institution's status in the region by providing potential sources of development income, benefitting ASEAN as a whole. India, with the help of Myanmar, can solve its issues of scarcity or energy sources. The energy sector can therefore be a win-win relationship between the two.

**Prospects for India-ASEAN Security Relations:** ASEAN's maturity has coincided with the



end of the cold war in Southeast Asia and elsewhere, thus giving it strategic leverage to set the regional agenda. ASEAN will remain the centerpiece of regional cooperation in Southeast Asia, although regionalism continues to be punctuated by intermittent frictions in intra-ASEAN bilateral relations, by competing territorial and resource claims in the South China Sea, and of late by internal turmoil in the regional grouping's largest member-state. Pressures exerted by broader regional groupings such as APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) may tend to strain and sideline ASEAN. Additionally, the growth dynamics in the Asia-Pacific might alter priorities in favour of global networking. Nevertheless, ASEAN will continue to be the focus of political and economic resilience in Southeast Asia into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The death of Communism, collapse of the USSR, the rise of China, emergence of Single Europe and NAFTA have increased the pressures on ASEAN economic integration—in the sense that only through free trade within ASEAN can the regional entity demand entry into the European and American markets.

Security in the post-Cold War era would invariably be approached as well as addressed simultaneously at three levels: (i) the technical—notably the military approach dominant during the cold war; (ii) the institutional approach—characterized by leaders mobilizing appropriate institutions to broaden governmental legitimacy; and (iii) the societal approach—marked by emphasis on the social dimensions of human security, such as economic growth, welfare distribution policies, and democratic choice. As one ASEAN analyst notes, security in the East Asian context “has many dimensions, not just military defence, but also economic, social, political, ecological, among others. It operates at various levels, from the individual and his diverse associations including the state, to the relations between states at the regional and global levels”.<sup>17</sup> ASEAN security in the post-Cold War era must inevitably combine all three elements: a dynamic fusion of the technical, institutional, and societal dimensions of security to ensure national, regional, and international survival. ASEAN regionalism is based on three key principles of TAC (Treaty of Amity and Cooperation signed in Bali, in February 1976): (i) non-interference; (ii) renunciation of threat or use of force; and (iii) peaceful resolution of conflicts. All of the above make India a strategic partner of ASEAN for the 21<sup>st</sup> century—an epoch likely to be marked by three trends:

- a) Changing strategic relations between and among major players in Asia: China and Russia, India and Russia, India and China, India and USA, USA and Russia, USA and China, and India and ASEAN, and even USA and Japan, as well as China and Japan. For instance, the strategic partnership recently forged by Russia and China is clearly motivated by the desire to resist US dominance;
- b) The expansion of regionalism as a global phenomenon would directly impact upon strategies and modalities for conflict management and resolution, as already evidenced by the ASEAN initiated ARF; and
- c) The levels and types of mutual suspicions and hostilities between major and regional powers in the post-Cold War period. For instance, ethnic conflicts in South Asia, as well as bilateral tensions between India and Pakistan can draw New Delhi's attention away from Southeast Asia. In contrast, ASEAN's desire for a more equitable post-cold war balance of power would tend to strengthen India's role as a major, if not key player in the regional balance of the emerging 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In any event, the disutility of nuclear weapons in influencing conventional balance of power considerations—proven since the nuclear balance of terror between the US and the USSR came into force in the early 1950s—is as applicable to the Asian balance of power as it is to Europe. While nuclear weapons might well boost the psychological security of the new arrivals, the currency of exchange in international politics will still be characterized by the traditional elements of national power: domestic cohesion, economic strength, equitable wealth distribution, military capability, technological, industrial, and scientific progress, human resource management and productivity, and diplomatic dexterity in managing a dynamic balance of power<sup>18</sup>. In this regard, India as an emerging major Asian power intent on affecting the balance in its favour does face major internal as well as external challenges in its geo-strategic environment at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Closer cooperation between India and ASEAN hinges to a considerable extent on the capacity of India to manage its immediate security environment in South Asia. New Delhi's increased desire for closer political and economic cooperation with Southeast Asia



cannot be divorced from the continuing stalemate in regional cooperation underscored by SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation)<sup>19</sup>. Although all seven members of SAARC (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, and Maldives) endorsed the South Asian Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA) in November 1995, the road to progress is being complicated by intra-regional and internal instabilities in key member states. India, therefore, views ASEAN's own progress towards AFTA (ASEAN Free Trade Area) in a more positive light, engendering prospects for enhanced regional cooperation between New Delhi and the Southeast Asian grouping. In line with the achievement of AFTA by 2002, member states have evidenced commitment to this goal by speeding up industrialization and internal adjustment programmes, as well as restructuring ASEAN organization and the Secretariat<sup>20</sup>.

ASEAN remains a region of vital importance to external Asian powers such as India whose strategic orientation has changed towards closer political and economic cooperation with Southeast Asia after the Cold War. ASEAN's resilience would be a crucial factor in its reaction to external powers. The idea of ASEAN being the focus of political and economic resilience in Southeast Asia would well continue into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

**Conclusion :** Combating terrorism is a serious agenda and an area of convergence of interest for both ASEAN and India. India has been facing the scourge of terrorism including cross-border terrorism for more than two decades. ASEAN countries, too, have witnessed for a long time senseless violence against innocent civilians in terrorist acts as well as in transnational crimes such as arms and drug trafficking. The issue of terrorism is complex one with varying ramifications. While it is essential to go into the root causes of terrorism with a view to addressing them, trying to enter into a debate, which has been going on in different form without any result, over the definition of terrorism or to delay action against terrorism by linking it to its root causes only obfuscates the issue.

Further, India's predominance is seen by ASEAN as being marked in the entry of the US in South-east Asia and the changing strategic relations between the major Asian powers like China and Japan. It is hoped that India would be a countervailing force vis-à-vis China and in the event of China's resorting to

force impinging upon US military expansion, India will emerge as a power to be reckoned with.

Again, the ASEAN initiated ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) should be viewed as a model for conflict management and resolution. ASEAN's initiatives to articulate the regional interests will contribute to recognition and reconciliation. Multi-lateral dialogue and cooperation are essential to enhance trust and reduce tension, and hopefully, stable, friendly and mutually beneficial relations between China, India and ASEAN will help to curb the resurgence of nationalism or neo-nationalism.

India's active participation in the ARF's practice of preventive diplomacy will be important in India-ASEAN cooperation to reduce tension and enhance trust. India's acceptance into the Council for Security Cooperation in Asia - Pacific (CSCAP) symbolizes the understanding and constitutes an important step toward increasing mutual cooperation with ASEAN in building a structure of peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region. It is inevitable that India and ASEAN have to forge a closer security partnership to enable them to play a constructive role in creating peace, stability and prosperity for the region.

There are undeniable difficulties that need to be surmounted if ASEAN and India are intent on being closer. ASEAN's process oriented nature may sometimes be perceived as a possible obstacle to deeper relations. ASEAN and India both for pragmatic and idealistic reasons have chosen to cooperate further and deepen their relations. More activities that emphasize shared commitments to responding to non-traditional security threats should be done. They must also be prepared to harmonize their respective human rights and nationalistic and regional goals so that conflicts do not occur. A better and deeper relationship between ASEAN and India is ultimately to the benefit of the greater East Asia and the Asia Pacific. ASEAN and India both for pragmatic and idealistic reasons have chosen to cooperate further and deepen their relations. More activities that emphasize shared commitments to responding to non-traditional security threats should be done. They must also be prepared to harmonize their respective human rights and nationalistic and regional goals so that conflicts do not occur. A better and deeper relationship between ASEAN and India is ultimately to the benefit of the greater East Asia and the Asia Pacific region.



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