

# India's relation with asean



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

## IMPLICATIONS ON INDIA

1. General. India and ASEAN share age old historical, cultural and economic ties. These relations stood the test of time till 1962 after which India somehow disengaged from South East Asia. India reinstated its 'Look East' policy in 1992. This was necessitated due to the growing economic status of ASEAN nations as also security concerns of India in ASEAN region, which could be handled better with rejuvenated relations with the countries of the region and for this ASEAN's coherence is in India's vital national interest. Both traditional and non-traditional security concerns of ASEAN have direct or indirect bearing on the overall security of the region in general and India in particular. Traditional security concerns like nuclear proliferation, regional cooperation, balance of power and defense capabilities and non-traditional security concerns like financial collapse and domestic governance problems, both influence India's, strategic position in the region as non traditional security concerns can lead to traditional security concerns.

2. China's Influence . Increasing efforts of China to increase and expand its influence in the ASEAN region is a matter of grave concern to India, both economically and in the field of security. With ASEAN expanding to form ASEAN plus three coalitions ASEAN now includes China, South Korea and Japan has far reaching effects on Indian "Look East Policy". The various effects of growing Chinese influence are:

(a) Security regionalism in Asia, led by the ASEAN, is being severely tested by the growing intensity of the China's territorial disputes with its maritime neighbors in the East and South China Seas.

(b) China's refusal to collectively engage ASEAN on South China Sea issue and its growing ability to wean away individual members of the organization underlines the dangers of the new dynamics in ASEAN. One outcome of this was annual meetings of ASEAN foreign ministers in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, in July

2012, ended in political disarray over the question of territorial disputes in the South China Sea. For the first time in the history of the organization, ministers failed to issue a joint statement, and many analysts have attributed this outcome to Beijing's new ability to influence the internal dynamic in the ASEAN. These efforts of China to engage all ASEAN nations bilaterally may undermine the strength of ASEAN which is contrary to Indian desires of strong ASEAN that can insulate SE Asia from any external interventions.

(c) Military Expansion. China has also increased its military influence in the South China Sea. The recent incursions of China into the Spratly islands and the Mischief Reef will affect India militarily. China will have far reaching influence in the area especially with Hong Kong and Macao already amalgamated into the Peoples Republic of China. In the event of a confrontation between India and China, the latter would have greater influence in ASEAN region inversely affecting India's security as well as regional and international standing.

(d) Economic Expansion. In today's globalised world economy and military capabilities of a nation are closely linked. China is fast emerging as an international economic force. Its influence on the ASEAN economies is

considerable and growing. With the military expansion into ASEAN, China could harm India's economic security. If relations between India and China deteriorate, a strong military presence of China in the South China Sea could sever Indian sea lines of communications in the region affecting trade with the countries of the region. China at the moment is concentrating on building its economic power and does not appear to have a military bearing in the region. It is trying to settle its disputes i. e. Spratly islands according to the laws of the sea, has withdrawn its naval forces from Senkaku islands and Mischief Reef, but the future could be very different which India needs to plan for and guard against. The straits of Malacca in South East Asia form a bottleneck on the maritime route to East Asia and Asia-Pacific region.

(e) The Burmese Connection . Burma or Myanmar, a member of ASEAN has important security implications for India. Myanmar is traditionally

China's close aide and is dependent on China for many of its economic and military needs. China's influence in Burma poses a security concern to India, more so because Myanmar and India share common land and sea borders. In the event of a China -India confrontation, China could use Myanmar land and sea areas for military action against India. China already, has established its bases in Myanmar to monitor India's missile tests at Chandipur. Through Myanmar China could not only threaten India's security from land but also from sea. With a pro-communist military government in Myanmar and its over-dependence on China India's security interests are threatened. With Myanmar joining ASEAN and ARF, there is increased pressure to restore

democracy and this would draw Myanmar away from its dependence on a communist China.

3. Insurgency. ASEAN is a region fraught with ethnic and communal insurgency problems. India faces similar problems in various parts of the country. Myanmar an ASEAN state has a sizeable border with Indian Eastern States. The near porous border is used by insurgents to move to and fro. The thick jungles in Myanmar form ideal bases for insurgents to hide and use these areas as launch pads for insurgent activity into India. After striking into India these insurgents slip into Myanmar making India's tackling of this problem increasingly difficult. The linguistic and ethnic similarity of the people on both sides makes identification of insurgents extremely difficult.

4. Terrorism. The September 11 attacks on the World Trade Centre and subsequent attacks in India are a tragic reminder that international terrorism does not respect national borders-and requires global[1]and regional solutions. The ASEAN region has more than 300 million Muslims, many of them supporting Muslim terrorist organizations like the Al-Qaeda. India is one of the most badly affected countries by terrorism. With close cultural and religious links between India and many ASEAN countries there is a danger of terrorism spreading to India from ASEAN nations, if it already has not happened. Since extradition treaties do not exist between India and these nations criminals committing crimes in India go unpunished after escaping to these nations. The internal security of India has already been affected on many occasions. Many Muslim terrorist organizations operating from ASEAN countries are spreading terrorism in India. These organizations having an

international infrastructure with a common agenda could threaten India's security if not controlled.

5. Increasing Military Capability . In the present scenario the ASEAN nations do not have any military conflict areas with India . However, most of them have reasonably

strong armed forces which are being further strengthened. Indonesia has recently acquired an aircraft carrier and Thailand, Vietnam and Myanmar have strong military capabilities. In future should a conflict arise between any ASEAN nations with India and considering the proximity to India's Eastern waters as also the maritime trade routes, which India uses, it could be a security threat to India.

6. Weapons of Mass Destruction . Many strategic analysts consider Asia as a possible hot spot for nuclear confrontation. The only nuclear attack in Japan took place in the vicinity of ASEAN nations. Ever since, many Asian powers have developed overtly or covertly nuclear capabilities which could trigger a nuclear war in the region. China has the third largest nuclear arsenal in the world. With China's common communist ideology with many ASEAN states nuclear proliferation of the region cannot be ruled out. A similar proliferation is possible to certain ASEAN Muslim nations through Pakistan. Another potential nuclear challenge resides in the Korean Peninsula, where North Korea now faces the need to either fish or cut bait with respect to its nuclear program. A North Korean nuclear capability would raise the stakes of war on the peninsula, and increase the pressure on Japan and South Korea to mount nuclear weapon programs of their own. All these above events, occurring in

the Indian backyard would threaten Indian security interest in the region.

The latest nuclear and biological threat exists from terrorists. Since religious fundamentalism is predominant in various ASEAN states, the availability of such weapons of mass destruction with terrorists could become a serious issue of concern to India.

7. Safety of SLOC'S. Region of Bay of Bengal and Malacca Strait is very important to India as India's strategic strength lies in this region, which has the potential to create vulnerability to China. Security of SLOCs and island territory is a concern but

India is well poised to take care of this aspect. This is also an area of cooperation with ASEAN and Asia Pacific countries. The increasing importance of maritime trade and energy security for India has made it imperative to ensure the safety of Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOC's) in Southeast Asia. Maritime piracy has large implications for security in the economic sphere and in the Malacca Straits, is a common threat to India and the ASEAN region. With India being dependent on sea ways for over 97 per cent of its global trade, the safety of sea lanes around the ASEAN region is of vital importance

to India. India understands that a prosperous and stable ASEAN that safeguards vital sea lanes between the Indian and Pacific Oceans will serve its best interests. Coordination between India and ASEAN in safeguarding their shared marine environment and its resources, promoting the safety and security of navigation in their common ocean areas, and ensuring legitimate,

peaceful and sustainable uses of the oceans, can contribute to both maritime development and maritime security in the region.

8. US Withdrawal. With the withdrawal of US troops from strategic locations in the region following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the South East Asian countries deemed it appropriate to guard against Chinese influence by setting up vital sea-lanes of communications such as the Taiwan, Malacca, Sunda and Lombok Straits. Accordingly, ASEAN countries justifiably perceive India, with the largest Naval forces in the Indian Ocean and nuclear capabilities, a strategic partner to balance China's growing power in the region[2]. This should be looked by India as an opportunity to go closer to the ASEAN nations thereby assisting indirectly in regional stability. Indian economy is deeply intertwined with the economic future of ASEAN region and should regional stability be disturbed it would have a cascading effect on Indian economy in general and security in particular.

9. US-ASEAN Re-engagement. Three important developments that took place in South East Asia in 2010 have come to redefine the nature and dynamics of the region's engagement with the United States - the most powerful player in today's international politics. First, in response to the Chinese designation of South China Sea as an area of 'core national interest,' the American Secretary of State, Hillary Rodham Clinton claimed free passage in the disputed area as America's 'national interest.'

Second, the US, in order to influence the trajectories of ASEAN-driven cooperative processes, became a member of the East Asia Summit in October 2010 and also participated in the ADMM (ASEAN Defence Ministerial



Meetings) Plus. Finally, the US President visited Indonesia along with three other important Asian players - India, Japan and South Korea in November 2010, integrating Southeast Asia into its larger strategic discourse on Asia. In fact, Southeast Asia seems to have regained its Cold War position of being one of the pivots for the US in the latter's grand strategy towards the Asia-Pacific[3]. Since most important driving force for the re-engagement has come in the form of an uncertain nature of China's growing diplomatic and strategic influence and the latter's perceived aggression in the region it will definitely assist India in checking China's future aspirations in the region, more so in the light of improving Indo US relations.

10. Certain non-traditional security concerns[4]of India in the ASEAN region could have wide-ranging effects on the economy, society and security of India. The non-traditional security concerns includes: -

(a) Globalisation. With Indian economy heading towards liberalisation and globalisation there is an increasing amount of capital flowing to and from ASEAN countries. This phenomenon could be a major threat to state security if globalisation is not managed properly by India. In spite of the financial crisis the vibrant ASEAN economics could still shift the trade balance so greatly in their favor that Indian economic interests could be badly damaged. This would not only effect economic security but also have concurrent effects on India's national security. Hence, it is essential for India to control and manage the pace of globalization to suit its own interests.

(b) Narcotics Trafficking and Associated Criminal Activities. India lies in between the two most significant drug trafficking areas of the world. With

the “ Golden Triangle” to its West, which includes Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the “ Golden Crescent” to its East to include Thailand and Myanmar. India’s concerns about narcotic trafficking are legitimate. There is considerable flow of drugs through India which remains a concern for social security of the country. Myanmar produces a considerable share of the world narcotics. The money from the sale of drugs is often utilised by insurgents to buy weapons and explosives which is smuggled into India for insurgent activities causing internal security problems in the country. The narcotic infrastructure is very well organized in Myanmar and Thailand. These drug cartels also have close links with India. This results in associated criminal activities like extortion, child labour and human trafficking, eventually leading to general deterioration of social security in India.

(c) Competition for Fishing and Other Sea/Ocean- based Resources . India shares sea-based borders with many ASEAN countries. Since sea-based borders are less defined than land-based borders there are regular instances of intrusion into Indian waters by either fishing boats/trawlers or military vessels of countries from the ASEAN region. With increase in population of nations and consequent economic problems the importance of sea-based resources would increase. This could result in confrontation between various ASEAN states and India, as was the case between China and Philippines over Mischief Reef. There are certain maritime areas where exact demarcation and delineation is not done. These areas could also be future areas of concern to India’s security.

(d) Environmental Security Concerns . India and ASEAN, as also the entire world are closely linked to environmental changes and disasters.

Environmental policies followed by one nation have an effect on the environment of all other nations. Global warming, droughts, floods resulting from industrialization and deforestation affect all nations. Environmental disasters also affect the economy of nations. A case in point is the forest fires<sup>[5]</sup> and the subsequent haze problem in Indonesia. The deteriorated environment affected tourism and hence economy of Indonesia as well as India as the tourist influx from India reduced drastically.

(e) Religious Extremism. There exists wide social and economic disparity between member nations of ASEAN. Countries like Laos and Cambodia cannot keep pace with the social development of certain other ASEAN countries, which are well developed. This leads to a sense of frustration and deprivation in certain sections of their society. This feeling coupled with religious fanaticism in certain society's breeds' religious extremism and sectarianism. This is the case in certain Muslim societies of ASEAN nations.

Since religious extremism now cuts across national barriers, many of these disillusioned youth are finding their way to India, inciting religious tensions and indulging in insurgent activities.

[1] David James, 'The ASEAN Summit', asia-inc, December 2001.

[2] India ASEAN relations: Analysing regional implications. IPCS special report by Mohit Anand, May 2009

[3] View point by Dr Vibhanshu Shankar, Research fellow at Indian Council of World Affairs, New Delhi on emerging contours of US ASEAN re engagement; 25 Mar 2011.

[4] `Regional International Affairs Program in Asia`, Regional Centre for Strategic Studies,

[5] The ASEAN Summit, `asia-inc`, December 2001.