Chapter 18

The Quest for Security in India–ASEAN Relations: The Order of Realignment

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ABSTRACT

The international system becomes conscious of striving for a new security structure in the world, moving away from archaic Cold War paradigms. The modern states are engaged in a process of dialogue and discussion with their friends and partners to help shape a new security environment free of confrontation and strain. India’s security cooperation with Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) can also include this theme. The nature of the global village has made it necessary to tackle even non-military issues of security in a comprehensive manner in general and those of the region of South and Southeast Asia in particular. India-ASEAN convergence of security interest is not only of great strategic importance for the Southeast Asian region but also for Asian security as a whole. This chapter attempts to view ASEAN-Indian security relations from the perspective of India’s ‘Look East Policy’ and ASEAN’s Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) for regional peace and stability. The present chapter outlines three looming aspects which shaped the outlook for India-ASEAN current security relations: a) complex geo-strategic and security interdependence in the case of conventional security; b) securitisation of non-conventional security threats through institutional mechanisms; c) cooperative security imperative for ‘Greater Asian’ security through multilateral engagement. By highlighting current security challenges, this chapter also attempts to look at the possible policy approaches that India and ASEAN may have to adopt so that their security cooperation is not merely sustained but also evolves further into a credible pillar of regional security engagement within the Asian setting.

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India is so situated that she is the pivot of Western, Southern and Southeast Asia ~ Jawaharlal Nehru ‘March 1947’

INTRODUCTION

At present, two dominant trends are seen in South East Asia: there is vast economic dynamism, leading to the rise of the entire region but there are also serious security challenges that could potentially undermine regional peace and stability. Since we are still stuck with a ‘post-cold war’ framework and unsuccessful existing security multilateralism, there is an urgent need to work towards constructing a new security paradigm. East Asia is highly complex, marked by enormous fluidity. At present, it is transiting toward a new order although it remains unclear what the new order is likely to be and when it will come about. Managing the current transition, therefore, is as much a challenge as fashioning a new regional security order. Against this backdrop, the historic India-ASEAN Commemorative Summit was held in New Delhi in December 2012. The “Vision Statement” of the Summit underlined the need for a stable and peaceful regional environment, ‘ASEAN’s centrality’ in open, balanced and inclusive regional architecture, and enhanced India-ASEAN co-operation for security, freedom of navigation, and the peaceful settlement of disputes in accordance with international law.

By adopting the Look East Policy in 1991 of P.V. Narsimha Rao, the former Prime Minister of India, this Southeast Asian region has become more prominent in India’s foreign policy. The Look East Policy has marked a strategic shift in India’s perspective of South East Asia. It started with the aim to enhance economic relations with ASEAN countries and has reached towards the political, strategic, defence, security, and institutional linkages in its second phase. Today, India’s Look East Policy has become more comprehensive because of the adoption of “extended neighbourhood” philosophy, to give real meaning and content to the prophecy and promise of the ‘Asian Century’ that is about to dawn upon us” (Gujral, 1996).

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The chapter is broadly structured as follows: The ensuing Part I explore the vitality of the South East Asian region for India’s strategic and security interests defined in its Look East Policy and how ASEAN’s vision of security aligns with India’s vision to advocate a distinct security order in Southeast Asia. Part II analyses some factors which are responsible for bringing together India and ASEAN to form the security cooperation. Part III discusses the non-traditional security challenges to the Asian region and India-ASEAN’s cooperative efforts to securitise those issues, whereas Part IV discusses how ‘ASEAN centrality’ can be India-AESAN’s preferable regional security order in this current security discourse. Part V tries to highlight some security challenges for India and ASEAN cooperation which need to be addressed urgently for the vitality of their future relations. The concluding part discusses the future policy contours of India-ASEAN relations with regard to the greater stability of the South East Asia region.
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