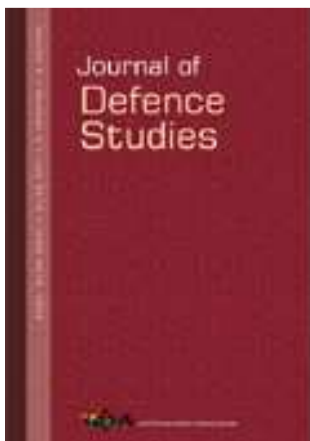


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India's Defence Diplomacy with Southeast Asia

An Impetus to Act East

*Vignesh Ram**

India's Act East policy is delivering results its approach towards Southeast Asia. India's improving stature in the region along with other key geopolitical players has heralded its arrival as a major regional power in the power matrix. In fact, India is in a unique position in the region in terms of defence and military engagement and must explore this potential further. India satisfies all the attributes needed for robust interaction in the military sphere. Unlike other major powers, India does not have any territorial disputes with regional countries; moreover, the absence of historical baggage in Southeast Asia works to her advantage. Despite this, India lacks a robust policy or enhanced interaction in terms of defence diplomacy with regional countries. This article explores the defence diplomacy potential for India's Act East policy and seeks to provide actionable areas for further consideration.

The Southeast Asian region continues to be at the centre of a major power competition. The rising competition between major powers such as the United States (US), the People's Republic of China (PRC), India, and Japan will continue to have a key impact on the region. Southeast Asia is strategically significant for world trade and commerce. The major sea lines of communication (SLOCs), which carry the bulk of the world's goods, trade and resources between the West and the East, pass through

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this region. The struggle for supremacy in Southeast Asia is not a new phenomenon. The contemporary relevance of this can be traced back to the Vietnamese independence movement in the early 1950s, and the subsequent withdrawal of Britain from the bases east of the Suez in the mid-1960s.

Though the US has remained the predominant power, PRC has also been a key player due to its frequently revised policies with different powers through different stages of the Cold War. The Sino-US rapprochement after 1972 gave more impetus to China to play a leading role in the region, cementing its ties with Mainland Southeast Asian countries where it traditionally had a stronger influence, along with its support for communist movements. However, China's gradual opening up to Maritime Southeast Asian countries, such as Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia, established its presence throughout the region.

Through the Association of Southeast Asian Regions (ASEAN), these countries have always tried to enmesh powers in the region and make major powers stakeholders rather than competitors. A large part of that strategy relies on creating a delicate understanding among the major powers. The ASEAN retains a central position in such affairs. Diplomatic fora then play a key role, and ASEAN has evolved various forums such as ASEAN+3 (ASEAN + China, Japan, South Korea), the ASEAN+ meetings and, most importantly, the East Asia Summit (EAS). These provide ASEAN with much-needed leverage in terms of the ability to set the agendas and rules, thereby creating a link between major powers.

India's rising prominence as a viable power in the region was observed when the EAS saw a hard diplomatic push from states such as Singapore, Indonesia and Japan, which vouched for India's incorporation as a core member of the Summit. The diplomatic thrust succeeded in India's favour, against opposition from China, thus giving salience to its growing presence in the region. Over the years, the partnership with Southeast Asian countries and, more significantly, through ASEAN, has been growing. Therefore, diplomacy forms a key component of India's ties with the region.

One of the least explored areas in the relations between India and Southeast Asia in the diplomatic toolkit has been defence diplomacy. The area has been challenging for India for multiple reasons, but holds a great potential for the development of relations. The increasing frictions have warranted countries in the region to look for a strong partner to restore the balance of power in Southeast Asia. In this context, India

can be perceived both as a requirement and a potential benefit for the countries of the region.

This article attempts to understand the concept of defence diplomacy specifically in the Indian context. In doing so, the article discusses the transition from India's Look East Policy to its Act East Policy, with a focus on the defence component within this policy. In analysing its scope, the article will also identify the growing challenges for India in operationalising certain components of defence diplomacy with Southeast Asian countries. Finally, it will also look at the future course of action, and how defence ties can be expanded further.

CONCEPT, AND INDIA'S CONDUCT OF DEFENCE DIPLOMACY

In order to address the challenges before India in engaging in defence diplomacy in Southeast Asia, it is important to first establish the various debates on the subject, and how they translate into an opportunity for India in the region. Defence diplomacy is a term which is widely used in international relations to denote the use of the military for diplomatic purposes. It is, at times, also known as military diplomacy and refers to the non-violent use of military forces through activities like officer exchanges, ship visits to further a country's international/foreign policy agenda. It has also been noted that at the heart of each instance of defence diplomacy has been the effort by one country to mould the strategic thinking and institutions of another in a manner that is amenable to the practitioners.¹ However, defence diplomacy has been perceived to have a number of other benefits too. It has been understood that defence diplomacy presents some key advantages for countries in Asia.

In Asia, defence diplomacy can act as a less controversial means to work less collaboratively on security issues. Analysts highlight that defence diplomacy can:²

1. reduce tensions and reduce crisis—that is, it can take the heat out of the points of friction, and keep the crisis from escalating;
2. it can improve information flows and enhance the mutual understanding of states capabilities, interests, and where their readiness actually lies; and
3. it can improve the strategic environment by building high-level trust and a sense of common cause through regular dialogue, and the development of personal links among senior defence officials.

Table 1: Defence Diplomacy Activities

-
- Bilateral and multilateral contacts between senior military and civilian defence officials.
 - Appointment of defence attaches to foreign countries.
 - Bilateral defence cooperation agreements.
 - Training of foreign military and civilian defence personnel.
 - Provision of expertise and advice on the democratic control of armed forces, defence management and military technical areas
 - Contacts and exchanges between military personnel and units, and ship visits.
 - Placement of military or civilian personnel in partner countries' defence ministries or armed forces.
 - Deployment of training teams.
 - Provision of military equipment and other material aid.
 - Bilateral or multilateral military exercises for training purposes.
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Source: Andrew Cottey and Anthony Forster, *Reshaping Defence Diplomacy: New Roles for Military Cooperation and Assistance*, Adelphi Paper, New York: Routledge, 2004, n. 365, p. 7.

Nevertheless, it becomes important to comprehend the precise dimensions of defence diplomacy before it can be specifically applied to the context of India. Understanding these components is crucial to analysing ongoing efforts, and the challenges present in understanding the concept and its usage in India. A comprehensive understanding of defence diplomacy can be derived from Table 1.

Defence diplomacy activities have been classified in a broad-based definition of what constitutes the activities. However, due to the varied geographical settings and the relative geographical position of countries in the world, the terms of engagement in using defence for diplomacy may vary. Broadly speaking, defence exercises do work as confidence-building measures. Using them in the context of 'diplomacy', however, denotes usage in a more positive manner in order to leverage the benefits which a country can derive from the exercise. Hence, in some cases, forms of military interaction can also be termed as diplomacy but may not fit the standard definition. Therefore, it is essential to have a holistic conceptualisation in the Indian context as to what military and defence diplomacy means for the country.

On analysing the trends in defence interactions and exchanges, it is clear that India, especially the Ministry of Defence (MoD), has gone

to great lengths to pursue defence diplomacy. The key achievements of this defence diplomacy can be categorised into relations with various powers, and segregated into multiple layers. The first layer is the relations with neighbouring countries and the states in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR); the second is the relations with major powers and emerging powers; the third is the efforts made in training and capacity building; and the fourth is joint exercises with other countries or multilateral fora.³

In India, there is no one policy document describing the conduct of defence diplomacy. Moreover, researchers trying to retrieve information through publically available methods are often told that the information being sought could affect India's relations with foreign countries, and hence is deemed inappropriate to be disclosed.⁴ However, some secondary sources do analyse India's defence diplomacy efforts, and what can be done to improve them.

It has been argued that India could take a few steps to modify and employ defence diplomacy in a more effective manner. The suggestions include:⁵

1. designating resources to increase the quality and quantity of foreign students at India's military academies and staff colleges;
2. improving India's expeditionary capabilities in the maritime domain;
3. increasing the Navy's share in the defence budget; and
4. improve coordination between the military and civilian branches.

Another major challenge is the under-representation and usage of the military and its diplomatic potential within the Indian foreign policy matrix. Although India has 70 defence diplomats in 44 countries, these numbers remain insufficient in terms of the country's growing stature in global affairs.

Integrating defence diplomacy as a potent tool into the MEA matrix would be a useful exercise to achieve the full potential of the Indian military's diplomatic prowess. To enhance the effectiveness of defence/military diplomacy, there could be the integration of the military and the diplomatic corps to specifically deal with the conduct of military diplomacy. In this context, there is no doubt that India's defence exchanges and the component of defence in diplomacy has been growing. One of the areas has been Southeast Asia where India has had a consistent policy of engagement with the countries of the region.⁶

At the same time, a number of strategic challenges have come to the fore in integrating the two components. There should be more coordination with regards to MoD and the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in jointly undertaking defence diplomacy efforts. While India has been making efforts to carry out specific activities in Southeast Asia, there appear to be some significant loopholes in its defence diplomacy efforts. As one analyst has noted, India has not yet identified its strategic allies and countries which are important to its strategic interests. Indeed, it can be argued that India has been under-leveraging its defence diplomacy potential to a large extent.⁷

After the end of the Cold War, one of India's first defence exchanges in the defence realm was with Singapore. India and Singapore initiated the SIMBEX exercises in 1994. Therefore, as many have argued, India enjoyed a sense of comfort in dealing with countries on its eastern seaboard at a time of great geopolitical shift and uncertainty. However, operationalising and formalising a coherent strategy has been missing in the larger quest for achieving stature in the region.

LOOK EAST TO ACT EAST: THE DEFENCE COMPONENT OF INDIA'S ROLE IN SOUTHEAST ASIAN GEOPOLITICS

India has been an important player with a growing role in Southeast Asian geopolitics, especially in and after the independence of many of the region's countries. One of the best instances is that of Indonesian independence: in 1948, India played a key role in safely evacuating the incumbent Indonesian leadership from the returning Dutch forces.⁸ However, the Cold War, which included domestic changes in Southeast Asian nations, withered India's position to a great extent. The absence of a consistent policy towards Southeast Asia was quite evident during this period. Moreover, most of the developing economies in the region were capitalist while India had adopted a socialist mode of production with a mixed economy.

Nevertheless, India did manage to build relations with a few countries, such as Vietnam, which shared a common disdain for China's behaviour in the region. India's rising profile, however, was in stark contrast to the ASEAN position over Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia. In this case, India and ASEAN found each other on opposing sides of the fence: the former supported the Vietnamese-installed government of Heng Samrin in Cambodia while the latter was left in a difficult position, or what could be termed as an ideological dilemma, in supporting the Khmer

Rouge and China or the Vietnamese-installed government in Phnom Penh. The subsequent talks strengthened India's role where India was an intermediary between Hanoi, Moscow, and the ASEAN. This was also in the light of improving ties between India and China.⁹

One of the reasons for India's initiation of the Look East Policy in the early 1990s was to revamp its foreign policy outlook and also develop relations with the West, specifically with the US, in the aftermath of the Cold War. The countries in Southeast Asia provided adequate space for India to experiment and understand the workings of a capitalist market economy. However, more importantly, the interest was more on finding a new strategic space in the midst of a changing global geopolitical system after the collapse of the bipolar system. This assumes importance as China's military capabilities have risen considerably over the years. Compared to its capabilities in the early 1990's, China's military acquisitions and its indigenous programmes have enabled it to match its rhetoric with action in safeguarding its territorial disputes and asserting its position in the region. Apart from its new aircraft carrier, China has also developed technologies, such as the Anti-Ship Ballistic Missile (ASBM), which have been seen as crucial breakthroughs in supporting its strategies of expanding its sphere of influence in the Asia-Pacific region.

Thus, though the Look East Policy placed emphasis on developing economic relations with Southeast Asian countries initially, the subsequent phase of the policy involved a clear focus on developing strategic and security relations in the East Asian region as a whole. India's ability to co-opt countries such as Japan was seen as a growing reaction to China's assertive posturing in the Asia Pacific region. Its growing conflict in the South China Sea (SCS) has seen a number of countries in the region look to India as a key player in adding to the geopolitical balance of power in the region.¹⁰ India's growing role in the region can be seen as an important indicator of its stature in the region.

The Sino-US rivalry, which has intensified over the years, has been the result of a rise in complex interdependence between both countries. China's thrust into Southeast Asia, both economically and militarily, has been facing strong reactions from US's policy in the region. The US has also been encouraging Japan's efforts to normalise its military and conduct its operations in the region. Japan has been driven by challenges to its sovereignty over the resource-rich islands in the East China Sea, and has embarked to both overhaul its defence posture as well as to extend

a hand of support to other countries which are trying to resist China's moves in the region.¹¹

Ever since the revision of Japan's military export policy, it has been able to provide more military support to other countries involved in the South China Sea dispute. For instance, Japan struck deals to supply coastal patrol vessels to the Philippines and Vietnam. The first of the 44m multi-role response vessel was built for the Philippines by the Japan Marine United Corporation in Yokohama, and funded by a 7.3 billion pesos (US\$158 million) loan from the Japan International Cooperation Agency.¹²

Therefore, there is an emerging competition which has seen the opening up of strategic space for military and defence interactions among countries in the region as well as among extra regional powers. India's interaction in the military realm even after the initiation of the second phase of its Look East Policy—and now Act East Policy—has been considerably less compared to its potential merits. For instance, India has been able to develop close relations with Vietnam, which has been one of its key strategic anchors in the region, and evolved a number of key strategic initiatives to scale up its relations with that country. Keeping in mind the changing geopolitics due to China's rise, both India and Vietnam have found a space to cooperate as well as negotiate.

As a part of its initiatives, India provided assistance in the repairs and refurbishment of the equipment of the Vietnamese military forces. Even though the first exchange was seen in the early part of the 1990's, India's substantial cooperation with Vietnam came forward after a 'Joint Declaration on Framework of Comprehensive Cooperation' between the two countries signed in May 2003. However, substantial interactions took place only in June 2005, when the Indian Navy provided 150 tonnes of warship components and other accessories worth US\$ 10 million to the Vietnamese Navy.¹³ Capacity building has been a key objective of India's interactions with Vietnam and other Southeast Asian countries. Over the years, the Indian Armed Forces have been actively engaged in training the Vietnamese Armed Forces, especially its navy.¹⁴ More than 100 Vietnamese officers have received training in Indian defence colleges and establishments till date.

Taking only Vietnam as a central focus alone does not indicate the evolution of India's defence engagement with countries in Southeast Asia. India has been steadily increasing maritime as well as other defence interactions with countries in the region. As India's interactions remain

ambiguous in nature as a matter of official policy, there needs to be greater focus bilaterally regarding the types of interaction which have been taking place between India and Southeast Asian countries in the area of defence cooperation.

Defence Cooperation

Defence cooperation is one of the key components of defence diplomacy. It is concerned with sharing operational and doctrinal expertise, the training and capability enhancement of one's own military, the strengthening of ties with other countries, and the sale of weapons and military technologies. It also allows for the examination and imbibing of 'best practices' as well as creating the ability to operate alongside, and enhances Maritime Domain Awareness through a variety of information sharing mechanisms.¹⁵ Table 2 highlights the defence exchanges of India with Southeast Asian countries.

India has a wide range of experience in training officers at its military academies. For instance, since 1948, a number of cadets from African and Asian countries have received 'pre-commission training'. Until 2017, 2,033 foreign cadets have been commissioned into forces from IMA.¹⁶ However, capacity-building in common interest countries plays a major role in bolstering the capacity of the countries of the region. The contribution of the armed forces has been important in enhancing India's profile, and boosting its diplomatic power in various regions of the world.

The case of Vietnam highlights the important aspect of cooperation between both the countries. Vietnam procures equipment from Russia extensively. Diplomatic and governmental exchanges between India and Vietnam have highlighted the strong component of training and exchanging of expertise in operating military equipment. India has, on two separate occasions, agreed to train various wings of the Vietnamese military forces. Since 2013, India trains 54 Vietnamese sailors per batch in the 12-month programme at INS Satvahana. Similarly, it has also been agreed that India would train pilots of the Vietnamese Air Force in operating Sukhoi fighter jets.¹⁷

Thus, it is now important to classify India's defence diplomacy initiatives and understand the areas which can be capitalised on. The first task is to classify India's defence initiatives based on its geographical setting so that one can understand the need and the focus required in India's immediate regions under the Act East Policy. Similarly, it would

Table 2: India's Joint Exercises with Countries in Southeast Asia

<i>Country</i>	<i>Army Exercises</i>	<i>Navy Exercises</i>	<i>Air Force Exercises</i>
Myanmar	IMBAX	India-Myanmar Coordinated Patrol (IMCOR)	
Thailand	Maitree	India - Thailand Coordinated Patrol (INDO-THAI CORPAT)	
Laos			
Cambodia			
Vietnam			
The Philippines			
Indonesia	Garuda Shakti	CORPAT and bilateral Maritime exercises	
Malaysia			
Singapore	Bold Kurukshetra	SIMBEX annual exercise is conducted with the Singapore Navy	SINDEX
Brunei			
ASEAN	Field Training Exercise (FTX) – Exercise FORCE 18		

Source: The data was collated from official sources, including the websites of the Indian Armed Forces. The data was also sourced from 'List of Joint Military Exercises between India and other Countries', available at <http://www.aspirantszone.com/list-joint-military-exercises-india-countries/>, accessed 12 January 2017.

also be important to look at what are the various components in place, and how some focus areas could be enhanced to benefit from existing policies.

CONTEXTUALISING INDIA'S DEFENCE TIES WITH SOUTHEAST ASIA

India's late emergence as a significant player on the Southeast Asian scene could be one of the reasons for the low level of activity in the area of defence interactions with the countries of Southeast Asia. However, over the years, India has substantially increased its interaction in the military sphere with countries of the region. For ease of analysis, the region can be classified into three units.

1. immediate neighbours (Myanmar, Thailand, Indonesia);
2. regionally strategic players (Singapore, Vietnam); and
3. tier three countries (Malaysia, Cambodia, Laos, Brunei, Philippines).

In the above classification, it becomes evident that India has engaged substantially with the first two, while there is more scope for expansion in areas of cooperation.

Immediate Neighbours

Indonesia and Thailand are two countries with which India shares an international maritime border. Over the years, India has been keen on increasing its cooperation with these countries. Presently, India shares naval exercises with these countries that include maritime patrolling of the international maritime boundary. It conducts Coordinated Patrolling (CORPAT) exercises with Thailand and Indonesia.¹⁸ Thailand and Indonesia are geopolitically significant because these countries are in a close proximity to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands—strategic Indian geopolitical outposts near the Straits of Malacca. Hence, joint operations are key to enhancing relations as well as trust and confidence among regional countries. Though the CORPAT exercises with Indonesia have been focused more on securing seas from trafficking and other illegal activities at sea, India and Indonesia have upgraded their naval cooperation to a full-fledged naval exercise with a view to building a navy-to-navy cooperation.¹⁹ India has also been expanding its relations with Indonesia in other sectors, such as joint drills in counter-insurgency training.

Myanmar is a crucial neighbour for India in the region. It is the only an ASEAN grouping country that shares a land border with India. Ties with Myanmar have evolved over time, keeping in mind the interests of the country. India's dealings with the former military junta in Myanmar was criticised primarily by the West; but the country has been crucial for the security of India's Northeast. India has cooperated closely with the military in Myanmar in flushing out militants in the region.²⁰ India has also cooperated in helping Myanmar with technology crucial for maintaining internal security and coastal maritime patrolling capabilities.

Regionally Strategic Players

India has shared cordial relations with countries such as Vietnam throughout the Cold War as well as the post-Cold War period. As discussed above, Vietnam forms a crucial component in India's strategic engagement in the Southeast Asian region. In terms of relations with Vietnam, similar military technology has been one of the key drivers of military cooperation. Vietnam is extensively purchasing Russian military technology—such as Sukhoi fighter jets and Kilo class submarines—and has asked India to assist in training personnel and providing spares for military wares.²¹ Vietnam is not only crucial as a defence partner in the sense of technology compatibility but also in terms of regional strategy. Being counted as one of the possible balancers in the region's geopolitical mix, India also has vital economic interests in terms of goods passing through the region, and investments in oil blocs in the SCS.²²

Singapore is another key partner for India in the region. Singapore has consistently pushed for India's larger role in ASEAN. India and Singapore share joint exercises in various spheres, including joint naval and army exercises. Moreover, the strategic geographic position of Singapore helps India place warships in key locations, such as the South China Sea. SIMBEX 2017 was held in the SCS near the vital approaches of the Malacca Strait.²³ Singaporean companies have also been involved in the development of defence technology, and supplying it to India. The exposé of involvement of a Singaporean company, ST Kinetics, in an alleged bribery case has led to the blacklisting of the company which was in a bid to sell howitzers.²⁴ Nevertheless, India and Singapore have made inroads into the arena of military cooperation. One of the unique opportunities for India has been to provide Singapore with basing facilities for its armed forces in terms of men and material. India has not provided such facility to any other country.

Tier Three Countries

The cooperation with Tier Three countries has been rather less when compared to the cooperation with regionally strategic countries as well as neighbouring countries. However, in the past few years, India has increased cooperation with countries such as Laos and Cambodia, which have been increasingly falling under the Chinese radar. Another reason for a lack of robust cooperation with these countries has been their poor economic condition, which disallows them from increasing their defence

spending. For instance, Cambodia has half of its government budget fulfilled through foreign aid (US\$ 1.5 billion).²⁵ At present, India has focused on capacity building and other allied sectors such as training air force personnel, especially with regards to UN peacekeeping operations in which India has substantial experience.²⁶ However, currently, the scope for increased cooperation between India and Cambodia remains somewhat limited.

India has taken some initiatives regarding defence diplomacy with countries like Brunei and Philippines as a part of its general initiatives in the region. For instance, the Philippines have been consistently increasing its capabilities due to threats to its territorial integrity from China's assertive stance in the South China Sea. But, India has not had much increase in cooperation with the Philippines and Brunei due to their geopolitical orientations to the USA.

Malaysia has presented India with a better opportunity for cooperation. It operates mostly military equipment from Western nations, and thus provides a good opportunity to expand India's export of defence technology that is cheaper and also effective. However, there are other key considerations, including regional geopolitical calculations and extra regional influences, which could upset India's plans in the region. The Indian Air Force, in particular, has been involved in training Malaysian pilots for the Sukhoi 30 MKM. Another area of possibility is training Malaysian naval officers in submarine operations at India's submarine training facility on the east coast.²⁷

AREAS OF FUTURE ENGAGEMENT

Thus, India seems to have been developing a unique type of defence diplomacy in the region which is related to its overall regional security environment. One other major area is defence co-production and sale of indigenous defence technology to countries of the region. Till date, India has been able to expand its interest in the region by the exchange of defence personnel and also supporting capacity building initiatives of the militaries in the region. However, as observed in Table 2, even with countries such as Vietnam, there is no formalised interaction in place in terms of joint military exercises, despite the common security interests between both the countries. Therefore, there needs to be a consistent effort in developing relations with the tier three countries and regionally strategic players, such as Vietnam.

Defence Co-production and Sale

One important facet of defence diplomacy has been defence coproduction and sale to the countries of Southeast Asia. The consistent development of technology with other partners such as Russia has also resulted in breakthroughs in technologies, such as the BHRAMOS supersonic cruise missile systems. The missile systems have been the centre of major controversy in the region. Though there have been some hiccups between both partners due to differences over the sale of other Russian missiles, such as the Yakhont to Indonesia in 2006²⁸, countries such as Vietnam and Malaysia have also evinced keen interest in purchasing the same. The biggest challenge would be to bring Russia on board, and mitigate larger geopolitical considerations, such as China's pressure and influence in the region, which could work negatively on India's dealings in the region. India has been able to progress substantially in the case of Vietnam where it has been able to sell missiles. India and Vietnam have also held talks on the probable sale of India's Akash missiles. The missile sale has been able to evoke a negative reaction from China.²⁹ India has also indicated that 'India and Vietnam share a strategic partnership. Defence cooperation, including the supply of defence equipment, is an important aspect of this partnership.'³⁰ The strengthening ties and the reactions from China itself indicate that advancing India's reach through military means can be a game changer for its ties with the region.

Apart from the co-production of defence equipment, another challenge has been the sale of indigenously developed technology to suitable buyers in the region. India's attempted sale of frigates to the Philippines can be taken as a case in point. Considering the convergences which the Philippines had with India under former President Aquino's term, there was a highly likely chance that India could have made headway in selling frigates to the Philippines Navy. However, there were some inconsistencies in India's ability to meet specific requirements which the Philippines Navy had envisaged. India's Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers Ltd. (GRSE) and Magazon Dock Pipavav Defence Pvt. Ltd., evinced keen interest in bidding. The former's bid was disqualified due to inconsistencies, and the latter chose not to submit the bid.³¹ In May 2014, the Special Bidding Awards Committee of the Department of Defence admitted state-owned GRSE as a bidder in the process.³²

The reason behind the non-filing of the bid could be related to the time frame put forth by the Philippines Defence Department of four years for two frigates; this may have been an uphill task for the already

full shipbuilding yards. However, joint ventures between private players who could provide such facilities could have infused hope in the process. It has also been understood that the GRSE had eventually failed the 'financial assessment tests'—a facet which specifies that the shipbuilder will be able to deliver the frigates positively on time, despite the payment being forthcoming only when the delivery is made. In its assessment, the Philippines Navy had felt that the shipbuilder could not possibly make this commitment.³³ Eventually, India lost the bid to the South Korea shipbuilding company Hyundai, which is slated to supply the new frigates to the Philippines Navy.

Joint Production of Defence Equipment

In terms of jointly producing defence technology, countries such as Singapore have been able to take advantage of the opportunities in India.³⁴ Though India has advanced in producing its own indigenous technology such as tanks, warships, and fighters, collaboration in certain sectors seems a possibility. Dealing with Singapore seems to be of advantage to countries such as India, since the former which has made great strides in electronics and communications and, owing to its years of experience in dealing with western technology, can benefit India. As a matter of fact, India and Singapore jointly produced offshore patrol vessels in India as far back as 1986.³⁵ Moreover, Singapore's defence sector is particularly unique among the developed countries as its activities are overwhelmingly concentrated in a single group of companies. This has been the result of government policy aimed at developing self-reliance, combined with a limited domestic market.³⁶

The opportunity with Singapore has been temporarily offset by allegations of corruption. India's defence foreign direct investment (FDI) policy and 2006 Joint venture between Singapore Technologies and Kalyani Industries under the 26 per cent policy are steps in the right direction.³⁷ Moreover, the range of technology that Singapore is able to manufacture is not very large. The offset clause, which has been a problem for western manufacturers, will not be an issue in this case, and the Indian venture aims to invest in design, engineering, and manufacture of high technology. This could have dual benefits for both partners as Singapore can expand its production base due to its Indian unit's capabilities, and India can gain additional experience from Singapore's technological expertise.

ACT EAST POLICY AND EMERGING TRENDS IN
INDIA'S DEFENCE OUTLOOK

The regional security environment has been drastically changing, with a number of key developments taking place. The Indo-Pacific has come into prominence by the important convergence of key geopolitical players such as India, US, Japan, and Australia. Therefore, with the rise of China and its increasing strategic posturing in the larger region, the countries of Southeast Asia have become key players in managing the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific. India's growing engagement with the members of the ASEAN has also been on the upswing, despite the slowing down of growth in the region. The elevation of the India-ASEAN partnership to the level of a strategic partnership has been an important move aimed at enhancing the relations.

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, the Government of India has evinced keen interest in upping the level of manufacturing in the country via the 'Make in India' campaign. The aim of this campaign has been to increase domestic manufacturing capacity and make India one of the world's manufacturing hubs. Defence production is a key focus of this initiative. However, it still remains to be seen how much of the key areas can be capitalised on in the Southeast Asian region. To encourage growth in the defence sector, the government has eased the FDI norms for investment in it. Major exports included defence platforms, and equipment and spares, which were exported to 28 countries. In general, there has been an increase of defence exports from INR 1,682 crore in FY 2014–15 to INR 2,059.18 crore in FY 2015–16.³⁸

Presently, majority of the market for defence goods in Southeast Asia is dominated by weapons primarily sourced from the US or the former Soviet Union/Russia. According to the SIPRI arms transfer database, the 10 countries of Southeast Asia have been seeing largely an increased engagement with multiple defence suppliers from around the world. From 2006 to 2016, Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia depended on China, while the Philippines and Singapore depended on the US. Similarly, Vietnam and Indonesia had Russia as their major partner in the region.³⁹ Hence, it could be interesting to see in the future how the changing attitudes of defence acquisition by countries in the region would provide India with an opportunity to collaborate with the countries of the region.

Another lucrative method has been to develop India as a viable base for defence manufacturing and export. In this context, there has been interest evinced by a number of major countries to set up defence oriented

industries in India. In June 2017, the Tata Group and American aerospace giant Lockheed Martin signed a deal to produce, operate, and export the combat-proven F-16 fighters in India.⁴⁰ Therefore, India can also capitalise on these initiatives to tap into newer markets in the Southeast Asian region. At the current juncture, the convergence, especially in the refurbishing, services and training, depends on the similarity of technology (Russian made) and the operational experience that India has in the area. If similar technology is produced in India, there is potential that India can become a regional hub in Asia, not only in co-producing but also in exporting the technologies to friendly countries.

Overall, there has been a positive attitude towards increasing the potential of defence exports to other countries. The rising influence of China is being indicated as the reason. Thus, it is imperative that India play a vital role in the region supporting the major players, and maintaining a balance so as to dispel the overarching influence of China in the region. It is this vigour that underlies the premise of India's renewed interest in Southeast Asia through its 'Act East' policy, resulting in an increase in its strategic footprint in the region. In this context, the latest is the Military Line of Credit of US\$ 500 million that has been extended to Vietnam towards boosting defence ties.⁴¹ At the same time, a number of challenges continue to remain in the area of domestic production capacity, which needs to be beefed up considerably if India's aspirations of becoming an export hub are to be fulfilled.

In the larger scheme of things, India's growing engagement with Japan seems to have set the stage for a new re-adjustment of the security scenario in Asia. Despite the growing bonhomie, defence and the transfer of technology in defence deals remain the two major obstacles for any tangible defence exchange between both countries. The long-standing deal with Japan to supply the US-2 Amphibious aircraft and the recent failed bid to submit the Request of Information by Japan for the Soryu class submarines for the Indian Navy's new submarine projects are still key problems for Indo-Japan cooperation in the defence sphere.

CONCLUSION

Diplomacy holds a number of key instruments in its toolkit through which it exercises and leverages international situations to favour the national interests of its country. The change in the outlook of countries over centuries has resulted in them now using the military, traditionally a warfighting mechanism, as a means of conducting diplomacy. The

inequalities in the international system between states is a reality in international relations. As a result, the ability to build cooperative alliances, requires conscious efforts by states to use tools such as the military to build trust and confidence amongst each other. This has made for the growing role of the armed forces in enhancing the diplomatic potential of a state.

Moreover, it is not only during peacetime but also during times of crisis that states can employ their military advantage to aid countries and build trust and confidence. For example, during the Indian Ocean Tsunami in 2004, the Indian Navy played a vital role in the relief operations in the affected areas. ASEAN's growing focus in this area should be incentive enough to enhance relations. Hence developing interoperability between the various forces becomes important. A good initiative has been the operationalisation of the India–ASEAN Field Training Exercise (FTX)—Exercise FORCE 18. India has been initiating more multilateral platforms to engage countries in the Indian Ocean Region and the larger Indo Pacific. In this context, India's multinational naval exercises are important.

India's diplomatic efforts have been paying dividends and, by emphasising its non-interventionist history, India can use its military to enable deterrence for countries facing challenges to their diplomatic unity. For instance, ASEAN member states have been divided over the growing assertiveness of China in the South China Sea (SCS). The disunity stems from the fact that the member states are, individually and collectively, unable to balance China militarily. India's presence could thus be seen as adding a stabilising factor to the region.

The Act East Policy has come at a crucial juncture when the world and major powers are viewing India as a crucial player in the emerging order. The Act East Policy (which was the Look East Policy in its former incarnation) started with Southeast Asia, and has gradually expanded to include countries of Northeast Asia, particularly Japan and South Korea, as important components of the policy's second phase. As for cooperation on the military front, there are concerns that an increase in such engagements is fraught with problems, both due to internal domestic considerations (such as with Japan) and external restrictions (with both South Korea and Japan). Hence, the possibility of cooperation could be restricted to posturing, and joint military preparedness exercises which signal growing but stunted interest. Hence, joint development is possible with the countries of Southeast Asia, but the lack of capacity to build

large-scale complex defence technology would be a challenge. A possible way forward then is to look at joint development on a limited scale to begin with.

Defence diplomacy has indeed strengthened the understanding between ASEAN member countries and India regarding its intentions and motivations in the region. At present, the best option for India is to improvise on its relations with some countries in the region, which remain generally underutilised, yet also capitalised by countries such as China. Myanmar is a case in point that highlights this effort. By strengthening its relations and also building on the interest shown by other powers in her capabilities, India can emerge as a major player in the region's geopolitics. Act East signifies a confident India that has nurtured its key ties over time. Yet, the strategic component of the policy will always remain underutilised until there is proper formalisation and coordination between agencies, and an operational policy in place. India should now work towards operationalising a policy that will propel it towards being recognised as a major power in the world.

NOTES

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section 8(1) of the RTI Act 2005. (The RTI reply PDF is enclosed for the reader's perusal in Annexure A.)

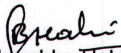
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APPENDIX A

<u>Time Bound/RTI Matter</u>
No.7244/DS (FSP) /1/2018 Ministry of External Affairs (Administration Division)
R. No. 37, South Block, New Delhi,
January 4, 2018
Shri Vignesh Ram Guruswamy 43, Ananth Nagar First Phase, Manipal, Karnataka-576104
Subject: Information sought under Right to Information Act, 2005.
Sir, Please refer to your RTI applications received by this CPIO on 18.12.2017 vide Registration No. MOEAF/R/2017/51266 dated 18 December 2017, seeking information under RTI Act 2005. The reply of this CPIO is as under:
The information sought is scattered in too many files. To collate this voluminous information from the sources scattered in many places will disproportionately divert the resources of the public authority and also disclosure of the information will affect India's relations with foreign countries. Therefore, the information sought cannot be shared under Section 7(9) and Section 8(1) (a) of the RTI Act 2005.
2. If you are aggrieved with this reply, you may file an appeal to Shri Kartik Pande, Director (ADP) & Appellate Authority, Ministry of External Affairs, Room No. 4095, Jawaharlal Nehru Bhawan, New Delhi within a month from the date of receipt of this letter.
Yours faithfully,
 (Shambhu Hakki) Deputy Secretary (FSP & Cadre) Tel. No.:- 23011650
Copy (for information) to:
1. Mr. Kartik Pande, Director (ADP & RTI), Room No. 4095, JNB, MEA, New Delhi.
2. Ms. Deepa Jain, US (RTI), Room No. 1024, JNB, MEA, New Delhi