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Act East Policy, Southeast Asia and Indo-Pacific Maritime Security Cooperation

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India's Act East Policy is based on commerce, culture and connectivity with Southeast Asian countries. It aims for the closer geo-political and security relations with its Asian neighbours to promote Indo-Pacific maritime security cooperation against the rising threats from China. China's growing presence in the region has created a common concern not only for India and littoral states of the region such as Maldives, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Seychelles, Djibouti, Iran, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore. It is also posing a threat to the international actors such as USA, Japan, Australia, who are also looking for protection of their economic, strategic and security interests in the Indo-Pacific regional order through the 'quadrilateral' platform. India has deepened its 'easternized' maritime security cooperation at the regional and international levels as a part of its balancing strategy against China's assertive maritime interests in Indo-Pacific. The paper, thus, focuses on the recalibration of Look East Policy into Act East Policy by the Indian government in 2014 to revitalize the maritime security cooperation with Southeast Asian littorals and the holistic geo-political and security convergence with the Indo-Pacific regions in the context of China's increasing assertion in the two oceans.

Key words: Act East Policy, India, Indo-Pacific, Maritime Security, Southeast Asia, 'Quad'

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Act East Policy: A Game Changer for India

The Look East Policy (LEP) functioned as India's foreign policy instrument in the Asia-Pacific region. LEP is a strategic approach to tie with Southeast Asia (SEA) was implemented for commerce, connectivity and security purposes. The collapse of the Soviet Republic was a major reason which enabled India to improve relations with ASEAN nations.¹ Rajiv Sikri, Secretary (East) in the Ministry of External Affairs with responsibility for India's LEP between 2002 and 2006, also stated that "India's economic and financial crisis of 1991 coincided with the collapse of the Soviet Union, which was India's valued economic and strategic partner".² To promote regional development, it was crucial for India to form strong relationships with ASEAN's economically-developed countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia as well as Burma for its abundant natural resources.

Officially, Prime Minister Man Mohan Singh stated, "India's Look East Policy is not merely an external economic policy; it is also a strategic shift in India's vision of the world and India's place in the evolving global economy."³ Most of all, it is about reaching out to our civilization neighbors in South East Asia and East Asia. Therefore, LEP is a new geo-political phenomenon that India steps on toe of China in Southeast Asia region.⁴ The implementation of the LEP accrued slow results for India in the coming years because of the lack of far sighted attitudes of the leaderships and failure to remove the structural bottlenecks in finance, trade and defence sectors. The gradual connection resulted in the membership of India as a sectoral dialogue partner of ASEAN, and this was upgraded to a full dialogue partnership in 1995.⁵ Furthermore, India participated in the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (AMM), the Post Ministerial Conference (PMC), and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in July of 1996.⁶ The first India-ASEAN Business Summit was held in New Delhi in 2002.⁷ India also acceded to ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in 2003.⁸

The newly elected Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, reinvigorated the Look East Policy into Act East Policy for ASEAN and greater Indo-Pacific region. Its focus is on economic and strategic sectors. Its core idea is to make Northeast region as a conduit for India's relations with the South East Asian tigers.⁹ In his speech at ASEAN summit, PM Modi stated that "India's bilateral relations with Southeast Asian countries are very deep but we

¹ Baladas Ghoshal, "China's Perception of India's 'Look East Policy' and Its Implications", *IDS*, October 2013, No.26, p.22

² Anna Louise Strachan, Harnit Kaur Kang and Tuli Sinha, "India's Look East Policy: A Critical Assessment", *Southeast Asia Research Programme-IPCS*, October 2009, p.5.

³ "Prime Minister's Address at 16th Asian Corporate Conference Driving Global Business", *Press information Bureau*, March 18, 2006, <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erecontent.aspx?relid=16679>.

⁴ Mahendra Gaur (2011), "India's Look East Policy", *Foreign Policy Research Centre*, No.8, p.67.

⁵ "India-ASEAN Relations", *Ministry of External Affairs*, April 2013, accessed on April 12, 2016, https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/India-ASEAN_Relations.pdf

⁶ "ASEAN Regional Forum", *Ministry of External Affairs*, August 2012, accessed on March 19, 2016, <https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/asean-regional-forum-august-2012.pdf>.

⁷ "India-ASEAN Business Summit Begins Today", *The Hindu*, October 17, 2012, accessed on April 13 2016, <https://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/2002/10/17/stories/2002101702181200.htm>.

⁸ "Indian and ASEAN", *The Hindu*, October 9, 2003, accessed on May 12, 2016 <https://www.thehindu.com/2003/10/09/stories/2003100901591000.htm>

⁹ Joe Qian, "Should South Asia Emulate the East Asian Tigers", *World Bank Blogs*, March 24, 2010, accessed on July 12, 2016, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/endpovertyinsouthasia/should-south-asia-emulate-east-asian-tigers>.

also recognize the importance and seriousness of ASEAN that established its own identity and voice in the global economic and political affairs. India is looking forward to construct a ‘Comprehensive Strategic Partnership’ with ASEAN countries.”¹⁰

The rising influence of China in SEA and the Indian Ocean and the direct geopolitical challenge it poses to India requires the latter to pursue a strategically active foreign policy. One of the fundamental elements of AEP is to promote security, stability and prosperity of the northeastern states of India. This would be a significant yardstick on which the success of the policy will be measured. The government over the last three years has been trying to engage the state governments as well as academia and civil society institutions in the northeastern states to look closely towards expanding contacts with Southeast Asian countries.¹¹ The External Affairs Ministry directly engaged with Northeastern states of India to discuss the action plan for the implementation of AEP to accrue the economic and security benefits from Myanmar, Thailand and larger ASEAN neighborhood.¹²

Under the garb of AEP, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government sees the Land Ports or the integrated Check Posts laced all along the region’s borders as ‘trade rivets’ to the ASEAN. The Kaladan project is the major instrument to open the gateway of Southeast Asia for India. It will also materialize ASEAN’s Look West Policy of connecting and integrating with South Asian countries. Hence, it is the major reciprocal approach from India government side to mitigate the geographical disadvantage of the region to tap the tremendous opportunities of the region. Hence, Kaladan is the core of the regional strategy to enhance ASEAN-India connectivity.¹³ Moreh in Manipur and Akhaura in Agartala have turned out to be a major source of land port based trade for the region. India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway will serve as the main trade and tourism artery for the future of the region. It consists of Imphal-Mandalay 584 km and Mandalay-Bangkok 1397 km segments. It is a transnational highway in good condition except for 101 km, part of 120 km long kalewa-Yagyi stretch, which is being upgraded to 2-lane highway by India. The project is to be completed by 2022.¹⁴

To counter China’s expansion in the Southeast Asia, New Delhi to deepen its exchanges with ASEAN countries, for example, India exchanged with Myanmar's government heads and military officers to offer military assistance to counter China's influence. These maneuvers are part of New Delhi's Act East policy, which aims to configure a comprehensive cooperation mechanism in politics, economics and maritime security through developing trade relations with the Mekong countries and other states surrounding China, with an overt purpose

¹⁰ ‘Look East has become Act East Policy: PM Narendra Modi’, *Doordarshan News*, November 12, 2014, accessed on January 12, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KpcjEnBc2aM>.

¹¹ Ashok Sajjanhar, “Act East: The Importance of Myanmar and What the Modi Government Has Done about it”, *Swarajya*, September 12, 2017, accessed on October 20, 2017, <https://swarajyamag.com/world/act-east-the-importance-of-myanmar-and-what-the-modi-govt-has-done-about-it>.

¹² “Question No.4062 Act East Policy”, *Lok Sabha*, Ministry of External Affairs, December 12, 2015, accessed on July 12, 2016, <https://www.mea.gov.in/lok-sabha.htm?dtl/26237/question+no4062+act+east+policy>.

¹³ Prabir De (2016), “India: Building Connectivity Under the Act East Policy”, in Michael G. Plummer, Peter J. Morgan and Ganeshan Wignaraja ed., *Connecting Asia: Infrastructure for Integrating South and Southeast Asia*, UK: Edward Elgar, p.98.

¹⁴ “1630.29 Cr Marked for Imphal-Moreh Highway”, *Kangla Online*, July 13, 2017, accessed on July 28, 2017, <http://kanglaonline.com/2017/07/rs-1630-29-cr-marked-for-imphal-moreh-highway/>.

of containing China in the region. That's why it's seeking stability in the South Asian Subcontinent and adopting proactive policy on the Indochina Peninsula.¹⁵ It is supporting the construction of the Mekong-India Economic Corridor to connect Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam and, at the same time, projecting its influence to areas surrounding the South China Sea to expand its strategic space from the Indian Ocean to the West Pacific. In addition, soft power in the realms of religion, culture and modern democratic politics also constitutes an important resource for New Delhi to develop ties with ASEAN nations. Their cooperation has brought subtle changes to the region.¹⁶

India is quite naturally considered as the regional power because of its vast maritime borders in the east of Bay of Bengal and the west of Arabian Sea that form the subsequent part of the Indian Ocean. India, therefore, naturally, has historical and strategic claims over Indian Ocean resources. On the contrary, China, however, has been continuously gaining ground in the region because of its relative military superiority and economic capabilities.¹⁷ The contemporary developments which are visible in the fields of economics, security and politics in the ocean indicate that India is at structurally disadvantaged position in comparison to China. In other words, for many geo-political strategists, deep-rooted suspicion and mistrust became the cornerstone of the India China relationship. In this context, the neo-realist theory of international relations plays a central role in understanding the causes of the rivalry between India and China in terms of their national interests and geo-political domination. The perilous problem of security dilemma has been facilitated by the US, as the state has aggressively sought to lure India deeper into the regional security structure of East Asia. The US has given tactical urgency to support India's Look East policy and embolden Delhi to perform a greater role in Asian organizations and affairs. The US has made India as 'pivot of Asia' to establish Indo-Pacific alliance aimed to isolate China in geo-strategic, economic and defence areas.¹⁸

The Indian and Pacific regions are encompassed by several littoral states that are becoming economically stronger and politically more visible. Within the region, the Bay of Bengal holds the key to act as the forerunner for enhanced bilateral and multilateral engagement. In response to geo-political forces, multilateral approaches, such as 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' led by the U.S and Japan, the 'One Belt and One Road Project' put forward by China and the Act East Policy and Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) as envisioned by India are gaining traction.¹⁹ In this context, Australia's 'Look West' policy is also noteworthy. As a convergent

¹⁵ "India Pursues Act East Policy via Myanmar", *Global Times*, July 16, 2017, accessed on July 28 2017, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1056542.shtml>.

¹⁶ Shihong Bi, "India Pursues Act East Policy via Myanmar", *mizzima*, July 17, 2017, accessed on September 19, 2017, <http://www.mizzima.com/news-opinion/india-pursues-act-east-policy-myanmar>.

¹⁷ Eleanor Albert, "Competition in the Indian Ocean", *Council on Foreign Relations*, May 19, 2016, accessed on March 12, 2017, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/competition-indian-ocean>.

¹⁸ "Vijay Shukla: India's Maritime Security Dilemma", *Nikkei Asia*, April 13, 2016, accessed on July 12, 2017, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Vijay-Sakhuja-India-s-maritime-security-dilemma>.

¹⁹ Emma Chanlett-Avery, "Emerging Trends in the Security Architecture in Asia: Bilateral and Multilateral Ties Among the United States, Japan, Australia, and India", *CRS Report for Congress*, January 7, 2008, accessed on April 12, 2017, <https://fas.org/srgp/crs/row/RL34312.pdf>.

and/or competitive zone of all these approaches, the eastern arms of IO, the Bay of Bengal has once again gained strategic and economic significance.²⁰

India is wary of increasing China's capability in the Indian and Pacific regions. India is vulnerable to China's naval activities, called 'string of pearls' strategy that means that aggressive China's investment policy in several ports and other infrastructure projects can be converted into a direct challenge to India's sovereignty in the region.²¹ The strategy helps China to achieve the absolute hegemony by facilitating the stationing of its naval forces in the littoral states. Myanmar has become the focal point for Chinese engineers and military personals in roads, airfields, railroads, pipelines and construction of ports to connect efficiently with IO through land and sea. Chinese activities even spread to Malacca Strait, the Coco Islands and the Bay of Bengal. It is suspected that China has an operational communication monitoring system to collect intelligence about Indian naval activities in the IO. China is also connecting itself to Southeast Asia through the Greater Mekong Sub-region policy. It is establishing port facilities at Chittagong (Bangladesh) and Myanmar is in 'debt trap' of China that helped it to construct Kyaukphyu Port to expand its control in Bay of Bengal.²²

The OBOR has become one of the major bulwarks to invest in the infrastructure projects all over the world. The Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM-EC) project is, like CPEC, a significant component of the China-Indian Ocean-Africa- Mediterranean Sea Blue Economic Passage under the framework of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Maritime Silk Road Initiative (MSRI). It involves building a road and manufacturing corridor from Kunming to Calcutta, via Myanmar, India's northeast states and Bangladesh, at a claimed cost of \$20 billion.²³ Recently, China has successfully achieved the 'rail project' in the Chabahar port that reduces the hope for its counter-OBOR project called North-South Transport Corridor.

India had launched the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) in 2008 by hosting the naval chiefs from the littoral states of the IO. It emphasized upon the role of the Indian navy in formulating the nation's foreign and security policy.²⁴ It followed a multilateral approach to frame the security policy for the littoral states. India projected itself as a 'rising power' and therefore, it is a responsible maritime power. In addition, India has removed the past 'misperception' and 'distrust' about the international actors so that it could establish cooperation and agreement with regional and international navies in the ocean. In the upcoming annual meeting,

²⁰ Vishal Ranjan, "Australia and India in Asia: When 'Look West' Meets Act East", *IDSIA*, September 2016, 40(5), accessed on March 12, 2017, https://idsa.in/strategicanalysis/40_5/australia-and-india-in-asia-when-look-west-meets-act-east.

²¹ Dutta, K. P. Can China Really Encircle India with Its String of Pearls? The Great Game of Asia. *India Today*. June 15, 2017, accessed on October 15, 2017, retrieved from <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/china-encircle-india-string-of-pearls-982930-2017-06-15>.

²² Berlin, L. D. (2002). "Neglected No Longer: Strategic Rivalry in the Indian Ocean," *Harvard International Review*, 24(2), p.26.

²³ Kaya, O. T. & Kilic, F. (2017). Sino-Indian Strategic Rivalry in the Indian Ocean Region. *Journal of Humanity and Society*, 7(2), p.164.

²⁴ Pradeep Chauhan, "The Criticality of the IONS Maritime Security Construct", *Center for International Maritime Security*, May 25, 2016, accessed on April 11, 2017, <http://cimsec.org/criticality-ions-maritime-security-construct/25356>.

it focused on expanding the growth, development and security of the region by emphasizing upon the ‘security and growth of the entire region’.²⁵

New Delhi’s Maritime Security Initiatives in Southeast Asia

The Look East and Act East policies removed the reluctance of India and started building the defence and security ties with Southeast Asian countries.²⁶ The revised strategy of India Navy, titled *Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy*, in recognition of two key aspects. First, the rise in sources, types and intensity of threats, with some blurring of traditional and non-traditional lines, requires a seamless and holistic approach towards maritime security. Second, in order to provide ‘freedom to use the seas’ for India’s national interests, it is necessary to ensure that the seas remain secure under the mandate and responsibility of the Indian Navy for overall maritime security, including coastal and offshore security.²⁷

The revised strategy follows the principles and concepts of national security and maritime power, enunciated in the *Joint Doctrine of Indian Armed Forces and the Indian Maritime Doctrine*. It reviews the key maritime strategic imperatives and influences, articulates the national maritime interests, and defines the related maritime security objectives, such as the safety and security of seaborne trade and energy routes, especially in the IO region, considering their effect on global economies and India’s national interests; the importance of maintaining freedom of navigation and strengthening the international legal regime at sea, particularly the *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea* (UNCLOS), for all-round benefit; the considerable scope and value in undertaking cooperation and coordination between various navies to counter common threats at sea.²⁸ The maritime objectives of India have focused on the traditional and non-traditional security threats because of the continuity of challenges across the regional maritime security environment.

The maritime environment is subject to insecurity and instability inflicted via traditional and non-traditional threats. Therefore, India and ASEAN need to enhance the maritime cooperation by strengthening multilateral and bilateral engagements, rapid response mechanism, capacity building, developing regional Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) and maritime security operations. India’s AEP has put emphasis on maritime cooperation by ensuring regional peace and security in terms of global commons. For mutual cooperation, India continuously in favor of rules-based order, and therefore, we need to respect UNCLOS. In case of the South China Sea, India is in favor of the conclusion of code of conduct in the region. India and ASEAN need to identify the areas of convergence for freedom of navigation and other areas of cooperation. In the present geopolitical context,

²⁵ Michael L’Estrange (2014), “An Overview of Indian Ocean Security Architecture”, in Andrew Forbes ed., *Protecting the Ability to Trade in the Indian Ocean Maritime Economy Proceedings of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium Seminar 2014*, Australia: Sea Power Series 3, P.12, https://www.navy.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/SPS3_Protecting_Trade_IndianOcean.pdf.

²⁷ “Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy”, *Indian Navy: Naval Strategic Publication*, October 2015, accessed on March 12, 2017,

https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/sites/default/files/Indian_Maritime_Security_Strategy_Document_25Jan16.pdfPp.2-3

²⁸ “Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy”, P.12

structure of defining order in the IO region plays a critical role. India's focus should remain on ASEAN centrality by a nuanced approach in the regional power play for widening the Indo-Pacific collaboration.²⁹

India's capability to play a balancing strategic role in Southeast Asia will be considerably augmented after the completion of the project upgrading of Andaman and Nicobar 'tri-service command' which was established in 2001, into a 'major amphibious warfare hub' by 2020. It will have fully developed facilities for training and deploying sea and land fighting units. It will become a submarine base and an air force base to station Sukhoi 30 and Mirage 2000 fighting aircrafts. It would be possible to undertake Tactical Ariel Reconnaissance missions from this base to keep an eye on the movements in the Indian Ocean and the strategic Straits of Malacca in its eastern flank.³⁰ Long back, India's strategic thinker, K.M. Panikkar had said that "the Gulf of Malacca is like the mouth of a crocodile, the Peninsula of Malaya being the upper and the jutting end of Sumatra being the lower jaw. The entry to the Gulf can be controlled by the Nicobars and the narrow end is dominated by the island of Singapore."³¹ It may be of interest to note here that India's escort missions for the US ships in 2002 were undertaken by its ships anchored in Singapore. Besides being a full-fledged military base, Andaman and Nicobar will also have major facilities for hosting commercial traffic in the region.³²

The Action Plan of 2015-2020 between ASEAN and India has firmed up the partnership. The two sides stepped up their collaboration across a range of strategic issues, including trans-national terrorism, maritime piracy and nuclear proliferation. The recent developments in the South China Sea influenced India to continuously look for 'freedom of navigation' and pressed for the resolution of all maritime territorial disputes in accordance with the UNCLOS.³³ India's maritime security approach in Southeast Asia is defined by the increasing convergence with ASEAN. New Delhi is intended to promote liberal and inclusive regionalization in littoral states against the rising authoritarianism of China in the region. There are several platforms which India is utilizing for creating cooperation to promote maritime security such as East Asia Summit, ASEAN Regional Forum, ADMM-Plus, and the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum to focus on the security of susceptible littorals. The cooperation between India and ASEAN gained importance since China unfolded its expansionist and aggressive postures in the South China Sea. In July 2016, Arbitral Tribunal's judgement gave the verdict that China's claim to the

²⁹ "Strengthening India-ASEAN Maritime Cooperation", *ASEAN-India Centre at RIS*, Proceedings of the 10th Delhi Dialogue 19-20 July, 2018, accessed on March 29, 2017,

<https://aic.ris.org.in/sites/default/files/Publication%20File/DD%20XI%20Agenda%20Final.pdf>

³⁰ S. D. Muni, "India's 'Look East' Policy: The Strategic Dimension", *ISAS Working Paper*, February 1, 2011, No.121, accessed on March 19, 2017, [https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/126612/ISAS Working Paper 121- Email- India%27s %27look-east%27 policy the strategic dimension 01022011145800.pdf](https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/126612/ISAS%20Working%20Paper%20121-Email-India%27s%27look-east%27policy%27the%27strategic%27dimension%201022011145800.pdf).

[https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/126612/ISAS Working Paper 121- Email- India%27s %27look-east%27 policy the strategic dimension 01022011145800.pdf](https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/126612/ISAS%20Working%20Paper%20121-Email-India%27s%27look-east%27policy%27the%27strategic%27dimension%201022011145800.pdf).

³¹ K.M. Panikkar (1944), *The Strategic Problems of the Indian Ocean*, Allahabad: Kitabistan, p.21

³² W. Lawrence Prabhakar (2016), "Growth of Naval Power in the Indian Ocean: Dynamics and Transformation", New Delhi: *National Maritime Foundation*, Monograph Series, p.69

³³ Manish Chand, "Act East: India's ASEAN Journey", *Ministry of External Affairs*, November 10, 2014, accessed on October 12, 2016,

<https://www.mea.gov.in/in-focus-article.htm?24216/Act+East+Indias+ASEAN+Journey>.

‘nine-dash line’ is not valid and Beijing has not followed the internationally mandated maritime rules and regulations in the Western Pacific.³⁴

The expansion of India’s maritime interests is influenced by three factors. One, the deepening of economic and trade connectivity with the Pacific that resulted in more than three-fold increase of the trade from US\$ 21 billion to US\$65 billion. The ASEAN, Southern Pacific and Maritime Southeast Asia are considered the important regions for the expansion of India’s increasing economic transformation.³⁵ Second, New Delhi observes the security of Southeast Asian littoral states as an experiment for the international maritime law including the right to access common maritime spaces to promote the collective obligation of all parties.³⁶ India has promoted the idea of collective security based on ‘strategic equilibrium’ in Asia. China’s assertion has destabilized the South China Sea and intensified the power disequilibrium between China and India in maritime of Asia.³⁷ India aims for the peaceful resolution of all the disputes in the Asia’s waters to respect and strengthen the maritime international laws of UN. The government has emphasized on cooperation and collaboration in the Pacific through joint naval exercises and capacity building endeavors. While New Delhi has moved to expand its strategic military links with littoral states like Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam, its Navy-to-Navy interactions have also sought to generate greater operational synergy with Japan and Australia, bringing greater stability to the power balance in maritime Asia.³⁸

In Southeast Asia region, India’s maritime security approach is best visible with Vietnam. Four India Naval ships which included the indigenously built stealth frigate INS SATPURA and fleet tanker INS SHAKTI with a complement of around 1200 officers and sailors visited Da Nang from 6-10 June 2013. Recently a Coast Guard ship ‘Sarang’ visited Ho Chi Minh City from 26-30 August, 2015.³⁹ In September 2016, both countries upgraded their relationship to a ‘Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. India provided a US\$ 500 Million credit line to modernize Petya Class Frigates and purchase of 10 patrol boats.⁴⁰ Indian navy has planned to train Vietnam navy for submarines operations and considering to sale Akash ‘Surface to Air’ missiles and

³⁴ Shannon Tiezzi, “Why China Isn’t Interested in a Code of Conduct”, *The Diplomat*, February 26, 2014, accessed on October 29, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2014/02/why-china-isnt-interested-in-a-south-china-sea-code-of-conduct/>

³⁵ “India Asean Trade and Investment Relations: Opportunities and Challenges”, *ASSOCHAM India Report*, July 2016, accessed on March 10, 2017, <http://www.assochem.org/upload/docs/ASEANSTUDY.pdf>

³⁶ Abhijit Singh, “Arbitration on the South China Sea”, in *Line in the Waters: The Strategic Implications of the South China Sea Disputes in Asia*, *ORF Special Report*, January 2017, accessed on July 12, 2017, <http://www.orfonline.org/expert-speaks/arbitration-on-the-south-chinasea-implications-for-maritime-asia/>

³⁷ Prem Mahadevan, “China in the Indian Ocean: Part of a Larger PLAN”, *CSS Analyses*, No. 156, June 2014, accessed on March 12, 2017, <http://www.css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/CSSAnalyse156-EN.pdf>

³⁸ Ashley J. Tellis & Sean Mirski, “Crux of Asia: China, India and the Emerging Global Order”, *Carnegie*, January 10, 2013, accessed on March 18, 2016, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2013/01/10/crux-of-asia-china-india-and-emerging-global-order-pub-50551>.

³⁹ “India-Vietnam Relations”, *Ministry of External Affairs*, January 13, 2016, accessed on March 12, 2017, https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Vietnam_13_01_2016.pdf.

⁴⁰ Sandeep Unnithan, “Why India Needs to Ramp up Its Token Training of Vietnamese Submariners”, *The DailyO*, September 3, 2016, accessed on April 13, 2017, <http://www.dailyo.in/politics/modi-vietnam-submarines-indiannavy-vietnames-peoples-navy/story/1/12726.html>

BrahMos Cruise Missile to Hanoi.⁴¹ Vietnam has also extended the cooperation by giving permission to Indian navy to use its port facilities and the ONGC Videsh is granted two years extension to explore the oil in the Vietnamese oil blocks in the South China Sea contested by China.⁴²

India and Indonesia maritime cooperation has expanded since the two countries increased the meetings of military delegations and expanded the maritime exchanges. The complete naval exercises started outside of Strait of Malacca to increase the connectivity between both the countries.⁴³ The two sides announced the commencement of Strategic Dialogue, Security Dialogue, and to negotiate a new Comprehensive Defence Cooperation Agreement.⁴⁴ India signed the Memorandum of Understanding to expand maritime cooperation to strengthen the principles of the UNCLOS in terms of safety, security, and promotion of maritime industries in Southeast Asia littorals. Both countries agreed to promote peace, stability and development in the Indian, Pacific Oceans and beyond.⁴⁵

Singapore is one of the closest maritime partners of India, together they engaged through Singapore-India Maritime Exercise (SIMBEX) in Southeast Asia. They expanded the scope of maritime exercise into anti-submarine operations.⁴⁶ India and Singapore expanded military and defence cooperation in areas of mutual benefit, and explored the possibility of further collaboration in defence technology, and co-development and co-production between their defence industries. Both countries encouraged regular consultations between the Defence Ministries through the Defence Ministers' Dialogue and the Defence Policy Dialogue. India and Singapore explored expanding cooperation in maritime security and cyber security as well as in combating terrorism.⁴⁷ Both have included advanced naval warfare drills, air defence exercises, and gunnery live firings, even witnessing the maiden participation of Singapore's F-15SG.⁴⁸ Singapore's participates in IONS and multilateral Exercise MILAN hosted by Indian Navy. Singapore's membership of IORA and India's membership

⁴¹ Helen Clark, "Why Is India Risking Chinese Anger by Trying to Sell Missiles to Vietnam?" *South China Morning Post*, January 13, 2017, accessed on July 19, 2017, at <http://www.scmp.com/week-asia/geopolitics/article/2061550/why-india-risking-chinese-anger-trying-sell-missiles-vietnam>

⁴² "OVL Gets 2-year Extension for Exploring Vietnamese Oil Block", *The Times of India*, June 9, 2017, accessed on October 12, 2017, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/ovl-gets-2-year-extension-for-exploring-vietnamese-oil-block/articleshow/59512646.cms>

⁴³ "India-Indonesia Coordinated Patrol Graduates into Joint Exercise," *The Hindu*, February 6, 2014, accessed on September 19, 2017, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/indiaindonesia-coordinated-patrolgraduates-into-joint-exercise/article5661161.ece> (Accessed November 20, 2014)

⁴⁴ Baladas Ghoshal, "Indonesia in India's Look East Policy", *IDSA Issue Brief*, January 20, 2011, accessed on March 12, 2016, https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/137606/IB_IndoLookEastPolicy.pdf

⁴⁵ "India, Indonesia Agree to Sign MOU to Strengthen Maritime Cooperation", *ANI*, August 23, 2017, accessed on September 13, 2017, <https://www.aninews.in/news/national/politics/india-indonesia-agree-to-sign-mou-to-strengthen-maritime-cooperation/>.

⁴⁶ Koh Swee Lean Colin, (2013) "Looking East in Defence Perspectives on India-Southeast Asia Relations", *India Review*, 12 (3), p.186.

⁴⁷ "Joint Declaration on Strategic Partnership between India and Singapore", *Ministry of External Affairs*, November 24, 2015, accessed on September 2016,

https://mea.gov.in/bilateraldocuments.htm?dtl%2F26065%2FJoint_Declaration_on_Strategic_Partnership_between_India_and_Singapore_November_24_2015.

⁴⁸ "India-Singapore Joint Naval Exercise SIMBEX 2017 Concludes", *India Today*, May 25, 2017, accessed on July 17, 2017 <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/india-singapore-joint-naval-exercise-simbex2017-concludes/1/962685.html>

of ADDM+ (ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting - Plus) provides platform for both countries to coordinate positions on regional issues of mutual concern.⁴⁹

The improvement of maritime cooperation with Philippines has been slow. President Duterte in July 2016 supported the Arbitral Tribunal decision that emboldened China to follow the aggressive policies in the South China Sea.⁵⁰ There is deepening of defence cooperation especially in exchanges in military training and education, capacity building, and regular goodwill visits by Indian Naval Ships to the Philippines. Both sides agreed to further strengthen defence and security cooperation in the areas of maritime domain awareness, intelligence sharing, capability building, White Shipping and defence production.⁵¹ Foreign Policy Consultations, Strategic Dialogue and Security Dialogue meetings between the two countries have been taking place regularly. Indian Navy and coast guard ships regularly visit the Philippines and hold consultations with their counterparts. The participation of officers of the armed forces of both countries in various specialized training courses in each other's countries has intensified, as have visits by National Defence College (NDC) delegations, including the first ever NDC visit from the Philippines to India.⁵²

With Malaysia, India has made a slow progress towards expansion of the maritime cooperation. In 2017, Adani ports proposed to develop Carey Island near Kuala Lumpur.⁵³ Malaysian authorities are also maintaining relations with China, evident by the fact that it allowed the docking of Chinese submarine in Sabah in 2017. The two countries in 2017 reiterated their commitment to respecting freedom of navigation and over flight, and unimpeded lawful commerce, based on the principles of international law, as reflected notably in the UNCLOS 1982. As per the laws, they urged all parties to resolve disputes through peaceful means without resorting to threat or use of force and exercise self-restraint in the conduct of activities, and avoid unilateral actions that raise tensions, and they emphasized that all parties should show utmost respect to the maritime laws, which establishes the international legal order of the seas and oceans. Reaffirming the importance of strategic engagement of India in regional initiatives particularly in the ASEAN context to bring about greater security and stability in the region, appreciated the growing engagement between India and ASEAN, especially after the

⁴⁹ Natalie Sambhi, "India's ASEAN Relations", in L. Gordon Flake ed., *Realising the Indo-Pacific: Task for India's Regional Integration*, Perth USAsia Centre, June 2017, <https://perthusasia.edu.au/getattachment/Our-Work/Realising-the-Indo-Pacific/PU-24-India-Book-WEB.pdf.aspx?lang=en-AU> P.36

⁵⁰ "India Supports South China Sea Ruling, Calls for 'Peace' in Disputed Area", *Indian Express*, July 13, 2016, March 22, 2017, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/indiasupports-south-china-sea-ruling-calls-for-peace-in-disputed-area-2909822/>; "Philippines backs down in South China Sea after Beijing protest", *The Tribune*, November 8, 2017 at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/world/philippines-backs-down-in-s-china-sea-afterbeijing-protest/494449.html>

⁵¹ "Joint Statement: Third India-Philippines Joint Commission on Bilateral Cooperation", *Ministry of External Affairs*, October 14, 2015, accessed on July 19, 2016, <https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/25930>.

⁵² "A Brief on India-Philippines Bilateral Relations", *Embassy of India*, Manila, accessed on June 13, 2017, <https://www.eoimaniila.gov.in/page/bilateral-political-and-cultural-relations/>

⁵³ "MMC Partners Adani Ports for Carey Island Port Project", *MMC Press Release*, April 2017, accessed on September 13, 2017 <https://www.mmc.com.my/20170403%20Joint%20PR%20Adani%20MMC%20SDP%20MOU.pdf>

initiation of the Act East Policy of the Government of India.⁵⁴ Both participated in the joint exercises HARIMAU SHAKTI and to upgrade the exercises to company level, and subsequently to tri-services exercises. They agreed to institute annual talks between the Heads of the Indian Coast Guards and the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency including during Head of Asian Coast Guard Agencies Meeting (HACGAM).⁵⁵

Expansion of AEP to Indo-Pacific Maritime Security Cooperation

The *Indian Maritime Doctrine* articulated by the Ministry of Defence in 2004 underlined the shift in global maritime focus from the Atlantic-Pacific combine to the Pacific-Indian Ocean region. The first current Indian usage of the term ‘Indo-Pacific’ was by Captain Gurpreet Khurana from outside government, who specifically linked the term to vigorous trade flows and possible military conflict. The usage of Indo-Pacific term is proactively intended for the exclusion of China from the Asia-Pacific region by re-arranging the equations and alliances of littoral states of both the oceans without the participation of China. The notion of the Indo-Pacific emphasizes India’s importance, and so challenges the idea of a region that inevitably revolves around China. It stresses the central importance of the Indian Ocean, as well as the South China Sea.⁵⁶

In terms of geo-spatiality, the Indo-Pacific is broadly to be understood as an interconnected space between the Indian and the Pacific oceans. Its expanse is debated to be ranging from the eastern shores of Africa to the western coast of the United States, albeit with variations in definitions depending on each actor and their own geographic positioning in the vast expanse.⁵⁷ The interconnectedness and the interdependence of the two oceans is a product of growing forces of globalization, trade and changing equations between various actors which has broken down older boundaries and opened up new avenues. Growing mobility across the oceans has helped to formulate an integrated approach. Strategically, the Indo-Pacific has been seen as a continuum across the two oceans joined together by its main trading channel, the straits of Malacca. Two broad reasons explain the rise of a strategic imagination of the Indo-Pacific. First, the growing footprint of China across the length and breadth of the region and second, the relative decline of the U.S. alliance system and its strive for resurgence.⁵⁸

⁵⁴“Joint Statement on 60th Anniversary of India-Malaysia Diplomatic Relations”, *Ministry of External Affairs*, April 01, 2017, accessed on June 11, 2017, <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateraldocuments.htm?dtl/28297/Joint+Statement+on+60th+Anniversary+of+India+Malaysia+Diplomatic+Relations>.

⁵⁵“Joint Statement on enhanced Malaysia-India Strategic Partnership”, *Ministry of External Affairs*, November 23, 2015, accessed on July 23, 2017, <https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/26057/Joint+Statement+on+enhanced+Malaysia+India+Strategic+Partnership+November+23+2015>.

⁵⁶ Gideon Rachman (2016), *Easternisation: War and Peace in the Asian Century*, Random House, p.114

⁵⁷ P.K Ghosh, “The Indo-Pacific Region and the Rise of Transatlantic Maritime Threats and Challenges”, in David Michel and Ricky Passarelli ed., *Sea Change: Evolving Maritime Geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific Region*, Stimson Center, December 2014, p.20, accessed on March 19, 2017, <https://www.stimson.org/wp-content/files/file-attachments/SEA-CHANGE-WEB.pdf>.

⁵⁸ John P. Geis II (2013), “Why Asia Matters”, in Adam Lowther ed., *The Asia-Pacific Century: Challenges and Opportunities*, Alabama: Air University Press, P.6

Japanese Prime Minister Shinjo Abe imagined the Indian and Pacific oceans in terms of dynamic coupling to bring peace, freedom and prosperity.⁵⁹ Although the Indo-Pacific Strategy still faces problems of ambiguity as a regional concept and geographical scope, it has become a significant keyword in an evolving and dynamic series of geopolitical developments. These include the U.S.-China, Japan-China, or India-China power struggles; Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI); and geostrategic competition among regional countries in land, maritime, and other new domains such as space or cyber technology. The heightened momentum for the Indo-Pacific concept evoked a reaction from the Chinese government albeit a restrained one, as Beijing deliberates as to how best to respond in diplomatic terms.⁶⁰ India and United States are at the forefront of preserving the free and open regional order. All nations have a shared responsibility to uphold the rules and values that underpin a 'free and open' Indo-Pacific. India is increasing the tempo and scope of partners and regional institutions such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Mekong states, the Pacific Island countries, and our strategic partner India to address shared challenges and advance a shared vision.⁶¹

India is attracted towards the term Indo-Pacific because it points to 'India'; 'India puts the Indo in "Indo-Pacific"', with 'the "Indo-Pacific Century"', clearly a branding win for India'. At the official level, Nirupama Rao noted, 'the earlier concept of the Asia-Pacific had sought to exclude India, today the term, Indo-Pacific encompasses the subcontinent as an integral part of this eastern world. We are glad'. From his naval background, Arun Prakash similarly noted that such terms 'impinge on the prestige and standing' of India; and that the term and region Asia-Pacific (namely the Pacific Basin and Pacific Rim) tends to 'marginalize India'. In contrast, the term Indo-Pacific points most clearly to India as one of its central state components.⁶² India is also seeking regional supremacy by claiming that the Indian Ocean is 'India's Ocean,' and it is engaging different Pacific countries by turning its 'Look East' policy into 'Act East.' Likewise, Japan asserts a 'free and open' Asia-Pacific strategy, with Delhi and Tokyo coming ever closer in recent years under the idea of 'confluence of the two seas.' And Indonesia is ready to actively participate in regional geopolitics with its policy of 'Global Maritime Axis' as well. Indeed, all regional and extraterritorial powers have been more or less involved in a 'tug of war' in the Indo-Pacific.⁶³

⁵⁹ "Confluence of the Two Seas", Speech by Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan at the Parliament of the Republic of India, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*, August 22, 2007, accessed on September 19, 2017, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/pmv0708/speech-2.html>

⁶⁰ Chris Rahman, "The Geopolitical Context", in Thomas G. Mahnken ed., *Indo-Pacific Maritime Security in the 21st Century*, Sydney: Royal Australian Navy Heritage Centre, Conference Proceedings on February 21 and 22, 2011, p.6.

⁶¹ Ponciano Intal & Lurong Chen (2017), "The ASEAN member states and the ASEAN Economic Integration," in Ponciano S. Intal, Jr. and Lurong Chen, ed., *ASEAN and Member States: Transformation and Integration*, Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia, No.3, P.63

⁶² David Scott (2012), "India and the Allure of the 'Indo-Pacific'", *International Studies*, 49 (3&4), <https://dscottcom.files.wordpress.com/2017/03/india-indo-pacific-allure.pdf>, p.5

⁶³ Muhammad Saeed (2017), "From the Asia-Pacific to the Indo-Pacific: Expanding Sino-U.S. Strategic Competition", *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies*, 3(4), p.504. <https://www.worldscientific.com/doi/pdf/10.1142/S2377740017500324>.

The Eastern Fleet spearheaded the connectivity with Indo-Pacific region through ‘operation deployments’ or ‘overseas deployments’ activities. In the 1990s, Indian navy connected with regional maritime neighbours with port calls, joint maritime exercises and multi-ship regional deployments. Since last decade, these maritime activities have become regular processes that produced Indian navy’s ‘all time high’ operation rhythm in the region. Indian Navy’s Eastern Fleet four vessels, including some of its most advanced indigenous ships, have plied the waters of Southeast Asia and Australia, conducting exercises with partners and making port calls in Thailand, Cambodia, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and Australia.⁶⁴ The deployments are considered the embodiment of India’s commitment to its new “Act East Policy.” In doing so, what is truly new is the *degree* to which India is “Acting East” in the maritime domain can be fully appreciated. The AEP signaled a desire to increase the economic and strategic ties with East Asia. The unfolding of the policy is not a sudden shift but as a recognition of a long-emerging trend in the Indo-Pacific region that intended for the strengthening and deepening of maritime security ties with littoral states.⁶⁵

India has expanded the scope of economic and security and connectivity across the wide arc in the Pacific littorals including Japan, South Korea, Australia and the Pacific Island states. The fundamental aspect of AEP is the maritime engagement with Asia Pacific for security cooperation through continuous naval exercises, ships visits and maritime capacity building initiatives with the geo-political partners that is aimed to upgrade the India’s geo-political capacity in its eastern extended neighborhood of Southeast and East Asia. The expansion of India’s naval power at the eastern front is the result of the PM Modi’s ‘Neighbourhood-First’ policy, coupled with several bilateral and multilateral naval exercises in the East Asian littoral states have intensified the outreach of New Delhi in the Asia Pacific water.⁶⁶

There are naval exercises involving India, Japan, Australia and the US, ostensibly aimed at balancing Chinese maritime power in the Asian littorals.⁶⁷ China’s principal objection has been to the expansion of India-US naval ties. An abiding symbol of warming strategic ties between New Delhi and Washington, the Malabar naval exercise is the most wide-ranging professional interaction the Indian Navy has with any of its partner navies. Since Japan’s inclusion as a permanent member in 2015, Malabar has grown in scope and complexity, with the 2017 edition witnessing the participation of two aircraft carriers, guided missile cruise ships, destroyers, submarines, Poseidon P-8A / P-8i aircraft, and Japan’s new helicopter carrier JS Izumo. Increasingly, Exercise Malabar has focused on the higher end of the naval operational spectrum, with special emphasis on anti-

⁶⁴ Aman Thakker, “A Rising India in the Indian Ocean Needs a Strong Navy”, *Center for Strategic & International Studies*, accessed on July 19, 2017, <https://www.csis.org/npfp/rising-india-indian-ocean-needs-strong-navy>

⁶⁵ Scott Cheney-Peters, “India’s Maritime Acts in the East”, *Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative*, June 18, 2015, accessed on September 12, 2017, <https://amti.csis.org/indias-maritime-acts-in-the-east/>.

⁶⁶ Peters, “India’s Maritime Acts in the East”, *Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative*.

⁶⁷ “Australia Woos India to Counter-balance China”, *The Global Times*, July 27, 2017, accessed on September 12, 2017, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1058370.shtml>

submarine warfare, carrier strike group operations, maritime patrol and reconnaissance operations, surface warfare, explosive ordinance disposal, and helicopter operations.⁶⁸

In January 2016, when ships and aircraft of the Indian Coast Guard and the Japan Coast Guard came together for the 15th “Sahyog-Kaijin” joint exercise in the Bay of Bengal, observers noted a high level of functional synergy and coordination.⁶⁹ With Australia too, the trajectory of nautical ties has risen sharply. While Canberra has been strengthening its nautical posture in the Indian Ocean for over a decade, it has now found a credible partner in New Delhi. With the institutionalization of the India-Australia naval exercise, the two most powerful Indian Ocean navies are cooperating to secure vulnerable spaces of the Indo-Pacific region. While New Delhi has been hesitant to include Australia in the Malabar naval exercises with Japan and the US (for both operational and political reasons)⁷⁰, Indian leaders acknowledge Canberra’s support of India’s geopolitical aspirations, as also their vastly converging interests in dealing with China’s growing assertiveness in maritime Asia.⁷¹

There would also need to be more active involvement in relevant multilateral institutions, such as the East Asia Summit, ASEAN Regional Forum, and APEC, to which India has applied for membership. In recent years, it is clear that India’s engagement with East and Southeast Asia has been driven primarily by the challenge of responding to China. As such, the kind of regional relationships pursued by the Modi Government will be affected by the way China’s ties with India and its other neighbours continue to develop. Should China persist with its current accelerated rate of incursions along India’s disputed border, or should China’s presence in the Indian Ocean acquire a significant military dimension, India is likely to pursue a deeper relationship with critical partners such as Japan, Vietnam, Australia, ASEAN, and Indonesia.⁷² Similarly, should China’s assertive behavior in maritime territorial disputes in Asia continue to be regionally destabilizing, it can be expected that states in East and Southeast Asia will look more. India’s evolving relationship with the United States will also influence its engagement with East and Southeast Asia, given the continuation of America’s critical role and its stake in the region’s security. The United States has for some time expressed a desire for an enhanced global role for India.⁷³ The *2010 Quadrennial Defense Review*, drafted at the peak of India’s economic ascendancy,

⁶⁸ https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/PR180409_The-Nautical-Dimension-of-Indias-Act-East-Policy.pdf, p.12

⁶⁹ “India, Japan Conduct Joint Exercise ‘Sahyog-Kaijin’ off Chennai Coast”, *The Hindu*, January 16, 2016, accessed on March 12, 2016, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/India-Japan-conduct-jointexercise-%E2%80%98Sahyog-Kaijin%E2%80%99-off-Chennai-coast/article14001430>.

⁷⁰ “Why India Remains Cautious about the Quad”, *The Lowy Interpreter*, April 26, 2017, accessed on August 10, 2017, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/india-remains-cautious-about-quad>

⁷¹ Vishal Ranjan, “Australia and India in Asia: When ‘Look West’ Meets Act East”, *Strategic Analysis, IDSA*, 40, August 7, 2016, accessed on April 10, 2017, at <http://www.tandfonline.com/eprint/HNhyMFC3GT7ftNtbKsg/full>

⁷² Danielle Rajendram, “India’s new Asia-Pacific Strategy: Modi Acts East”, *Lowy Institute*, December 2014, accessed on April 12, 2016, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/indias-new-asia-pacific-strategy-modi-acts-east.pdf>.

⁷³ Ben Dolven, Mark Manyin & Shirley A. Kan, “Maritime Territorial Disputes in East Asia: Issues for Congress”, *Congressional Research Service*, May 14, 2014, accessed on March 12, 2016, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R42930.pdf>.

recognized that India would be likely to assume a more influential role in global affairs, and contribute to Asia as a net security provider in line with its growing military capabilities.⁷⁴

In the past, India has neglected to articulate a clear vision for its strategic ambitions in East and Southeast Asia. Historically it has suffered from strategic timidity and poor defence planning that has impeded its ability to integrate itself into the Asia-Pacific. To establish the seriousness of India's commitment to the region, the Modi Government must demonstrate that Act East is more than just a rebranding of an existing policy. In order to preclude further inertia, India will need to move quickly to outline a clear agenda for deepening economic, institutional, and defence links with the region that go beyond what has been pledged by previous governments. If the Modi Government is able to achieve this, then India has the potential to assume a role as a consequential strategic player across the wider Indo-Pacific.⁷⁵

Although there has been progress under the AEP, the strategic thinking and policy formulation still present a glimpse of the past hangover. The influence of colonial mindset is evident in India-South East Asia relations. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi adopted two complementary foreign policy strategies: the 'Act East Policy' (AEP) and the 'Neighborhood First Policy' (NFP).⁷⁶ The AEP focuses on the extended neighborhood of Asia-Pacific region by upgrading the economic relations into political, strategic and cultural dimensions along with institutional mechanism for dialogue and cooperation. It is to expand the greater strategic linkages with Indonesia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Japan, Republic of Korea, Australia, Singapore, ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) and close ties with Asia-Pacific region. India has actively participated into ASEAN Regional Forum, East Asian Summit, Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD), Mekong Ganga Cooperation (MGC) and Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA).⁷⁷ The NFP has projected India as a 'leading' rather than a 'balancing' power to reflect the government's intent to deepen its engagements with the entire major powers inside and outside of its neighborhood demanding both hardware and software along with high level of credibility with them. The invitation to USA to play proactive role in the IOR provided the Indian government an opening to shape its strategic environment in the region. However, the USA is expecting reciprocity from India in the Persian Gulf, the Middle East, even in the South China Sea which might conflagrate the rivalry between India and China.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Pradeep Chauhan, "India as a Net Security Provider in the Indian Ocean Beyond", *Center for International Maritime Security*, April 29, 2016, accessed on April 12, 2017, <http://cimsec.org/india-net-security-provider-indian-ocean-beyond/24807>.

⁷⁵ Rajendram, "India's new Asia-Pacific Strategy", <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/indias-new-asia-pacific-strategy-modi-acts-east.pdf>

⁷⁶ Kaya, O. T. & Kilic, F. (2017), Sino-Indian Strategic Rivalry in the Indian Ocean Region. *Journal of Humanity and Society*, p. 165.

⁷⁷ "Question No. 3121 Look East and Act East Policy," *Ministry of External Affairs*, March 16, 2016, accessed on April 19, 2017,

https://mea.gov.in/lok-sabha.htm?dtl/26554/QUESTION_NO_3121_LOOK_EAST_AND_ACT_EAST_POLICY.

⁷⁸ Haran, V.P, "Challenges in India's Neighbourhood Policy," *Ministry of External Affairs*, July 14, 2017, accessed on August 22, 2017, New Delhi, retrieved from <https://www.mea.gov.in/distinguished-lectures-detail.htm?674>.

PM Modi had understood the geo-political importance of the small but strategically located IO countries. In addition, several logistics agreements were secured with international actors such as US, France and Singapore. India aimed to become Blue Water Navy with its *Maritime Capability Perspective Plan 2012-2027* to procure 200 warships and 500 aircraft to protect its interests in the IO against the encroachment by China and Pakistan. The plan primarily focuses on ‘force-levels’, driven by a conceptual shift from the old ‘bean-counting’ philosophy to one that concentrates on ‘capabilities’.⁷⁹ India has also activated the ‘Quad’, a quadrilateral initiative of U.S, Australia, and Japan to expand the security of the Indo-Pacific region. One of the major aims of the Quad is to establish ‘Balance of Power’ in the region against the increasing assertiveness of China. It is important that Quad must be expanded to include the Southeast Asian countries, particularly, Vietnam, Indonesia and Philippines to counter China in South China Sea as well. In addition, India needs to implement the logistical agreements with France and the U.S to gain the rights to access the Myotte Island, Diego Garcia and La Reunion. It must establish an agreement with Australia to get the access to Cocoa Islands. These initiatives of India will serve as a counterpoise to protect its all SLOCs against China’s assertive approach in the region.



⁷⁹ “Standing Committee on Defence”, *Ministry of Defence*, Fourth Report, December 12, 2014, accessed on September 18, 2016, http://164.100.47.193/Isscommittee/Defence/16_Defence_4.pdf.