India’s growing geo-strategic positioning and role in the Asia-Pacific is still constrained by a number of hurdles that act to shape a ‘continental’ posture to its security—despite its “Act East Policy”. It is not only the internal economic, social and political problems that India faces and the nature of the South Asian neighbourhood that remains as major impediments of such aspirations to turn into a reality but a myriad more reason that counter such growth.

- Nature of problems faced in the region, as well as within nations, which may be different than what India faces, making it difficult to grow a perception of the challenges that the region perceives as a whole, or nation wise.
- The nature of governance of the nations in the region, their political culture and economic growth.
- The influence of major powers of the world enhancing their sphere of influence in the region.

The eastward focus that has been major benchmarks of India’s foreign policy since the end of the Cold War is part of a broader effort to assert itself as a stable and economically rising polity. The growing regional groupings, trade regimes and inclusion of multiple non-state actors in the foray, grow the challenges more. The paper tries to identify, the manner in which India has been successful in positioning itself as a player in the Asia-Pacific region as well as identifying the challenges that it faces, making attempts at providing prescriptive recommendations.
The Asia Pacific Region: An Introduction

After the Cold War period, the world comes to unilateral arena. The post-1991 period recommended as a globalization period. Most of the Countries they have had followed the policy of "Lassie-faire". While India is still a long way from becoming a truly global power, it is a major player in the Asia-Pacific regional balance of power along with the US, China, and Japan. According to the United States National Intelligence Council Report titled “Mapping the Global Future,” by 2020, the international community will have to confront the military, political and economic dimensions of the rise of China and India. According to the Central Intelligence Agency report likened the emergence of China and India in the early 21st century to the rise of Germany in the 19th and America in the 20th, with impacts potentially as dramatic. The CIA has labelled India the key “swing state” in international politics and predicts that by 2020 India will emerge as the fourth most important power in the international system. According to the assessment of Goldman Sachs, by 2040, the four largest economies will be China, the US, India and Japan. According to the Goldman Sachs report, it reveals that India will overtake the G-6 economies faster than earlier expected and India's GDP, in all likelihood, will surpass that of the US before 2050, making it the second largest economy after China.¹ After decades of marginalization imposed by the structural realities of the Cold War, its pursuit of an economic paradigm that retarded its growth potential significantly, and its obsession with Pakistan that made sure that India was viewed primarily through the prism of Indo-Pak rivalry, India is finally coming into its own with a self-confidence that comes with growing capabilities. Its global and regional ambitions are rising and it is showing a kind of aggressiveness in its foreign policy that had not been its forte before. As a consequence, its security policy towards the Pacific is also becoming more proactive.

The geopolitical region referred to as "Asia Pacific" encompasses a broad array of peoples, cultures, languages, histories, and political issues. Interactions among regional actors are set against a backdrop of old animosities and rivalries. Up until recently, the Asia Pacific region enjoyed greater political stability than in any period since the end of the Second World War. Yet conflicts continue to exist within individual states, and these have led to the concern that intrastate security problems will worsen. The return of Asia-Pacific to the centre of world affairs

has been the great power shift of the 21st century. This century will doubtlessly be shaped by events transpiring in this vital region that embraces the Pacific, the largest and deepest ocean basin covering over 155 million sq km and straddling 30.5% of the Earth's surface. Half the world's yearly maritime trade, worth $5 trillion, traverses this economically integrated region that spans some of the busiest international sea lines and nine of the 10 largest ports. Its 4.2 billion inhabitants speak more than 3000 different languages and constitute 61% of the global population.²

Though the region has multiple attractions for rest of the world it has been facing problems since the period of cold war and those problems have been casting their shadow over the countries of the region and rest of the world.

**Three Major Potential Clashes in the Region**

- **The unfinished civil wars between North and South Korea, as well as between mainland and South.** These tense areas of political conflict stand out as the greatest threats to regional stability in East Asia for the foreseeable future.³

- **China and Taiwan:** Another matter that continues to be a source of concern is the conflict between mainland China and Taiwan. In 1996, China engaged in large-scale military exercises in the Straits of Taiwan during Taiwan’s presidential elections. While the confrontational rhetoric has since been tempered, the tension between China and Taiwan continues. Predictions as to what China will do are hard to make, since, as with the Korean situation, the range of opinions varies widely.⁴

- **The South China Sea:** A third potential source of conflict that has been drawing a considerable amount of attention is the land claim dispute that has arisen in the South China Sea, especially over the Spratly Islands. Six governments – Brunei, Malaysia, the People’s Republic of China (PRC), the Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam – have all laid claim to all or some of the region. The islands in question are considered important for strategic security reasons, commercial shipping, fish, and, potentially, hydrocarbons. This

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⁴ Ibid
last resource is particularly important as it is often by granting hydrocarbon concessions in disputed zones that claimant states exercise jurisdiction.\(^5\)

Competition to assert sovereignty has led to numerous occupations and low-level military confrontations between the several claimants. This dispute is not likely to be resolved soon. Despite their small size, these islands are very important, not only for the reasons already mentioned but because they lie astride the principal sea lines of communication linking the Indian and Pacific Ocean. Should one country succeed in gaining control of all the Spratly Islands, there would be a significant shift in the balance of power in the region.

Apart from these major clashes this region has several threats for its own region and rest of the world. Some of the major threat are armed trafficking, human trafficking, drug trafficking, terrorism, ethnic conflicts etc. All these problems are making these regions more volatile and vulnerable. The significance of internal conflicts for regional stability must be recognized. Mr Martin Rudner (Professor, Norman Patterson School of International Affairs, Carleton University) told the Committee that the weak state is perhaps one of the greatest challenges to the Asia Pacific region. While economic and social development occurred at a very impressive rate throughout Southeast and East Asia during the age of the "Asian Miracle," institutions, such as parliaments and legislative systems, lagged behind in development. Mr Rudner pointed out that the electoral processes remained underdeveloped and political party systems, in all cases, were compromised by patron-client relationships. Today, a minimal public infrastructure and negligible social amenities exist in most of these countries, and the states are, for the most part, unable to respond to the demands of their citizens.

Asia Pacific regions consist of the following countries. This can also be divided into East-Asia, South East Asia, West Pacific and Indo-Pacific regions as well.

**LIST OF ASIA-PACIFIC COUNTRIES / REGIONS**

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<th>Country / Region Name</th>
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<td>2. Bangladesh</td>
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<td>3. Bhutan</td>
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<td>4. Brunei Darussalam</td>
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<td>5. Cambodia</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. China, People's Republic of China, also including Hong Kong, Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China also including Marco, Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China</td>
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<td>7. Fiji</td>
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<td>8. India</td>
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<td>11. Kiribati</td>
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<td>20. Nepal</td>
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22. Palau
23. Papua New Guinea
24. Philippines
25. Samoa
26. Singapore
27. Solomon Islands
28. Sri Lanka
29. Taiwan, Province of China
30. Thailand
31. TimorLeste, Democratic, Republic of
32. Tonga
33. Tuvalu
34. Vanuatu
35. Vietnam

Asia Pacific Region: Problems within nations. This region has been witnessing the rivalry, race to establish dominance in the region by different nations and security-nontraditional security threats making the region more vulnerable since the cold war period. India Adjusting itself in Asia Pacific region in the Post-Cold War Era.
Figure: 1

Source: https://www.mapsofworld.com/world-maps/asia-pacific.html

Historical Background

This region especially Southeast Asia has linkages with India as the names are fairly early and occur in Kautilya’s Arthasastra, the Pali Niddesa, and the Jatakas etc. The names have been called from the world of plants and minerals as, Suvarna-bhumi (the Land of Gold), Karpurdvipa (the Island of Camphor), Yavadvipa (the Island of Barley) etc. After independence, Jawaharlal Nehru was of the view that India should expand its influence over Southeast Asia and other regions of Asia-Pacific as well. ARC (Asian Regional Conference) was convened by Jawaharlal Nehru in 1946.

The idea of a Southeast Asian grouping received support from nationalist leaders in Burma and Vietnam. It was part of the pan-Asian thinking of General Aung San of Burma who explained in

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1946 that: while India should be one entity and China another, Southeast Asia as a whole should form an entity — then, finally, we should come together in a bigger union with the participation of other parts of Asia as well.\(^7\) 

One of the main impediments that had come in the way of a confluence of strategic thinking with regard to Southeast Asia and India was the established view during the Cold War days (when military alliances such as SEATO, CENTO or NATO were created) that the western boundary of Asia terminated in Thailand or (if stretched a bit further) in Burma (now Myanmar). In fact, India shares a 1,600 kilometer-long eastern land boundary with Myanmar, maritime boundaries with Myanmar, Thailand and Indonesia, and is separated from Indonesia by a very short distance. By virtue of this geography as well as civilizational contacts in culture, religion, language and trade, growing business and investment in contemporary times, and the presence of a large Indian diaspora, India has not only a deep “geographical footprint” in the Asia-Pacific, but clearly stands out as an integral part of the region.

It was indeed ironical that India, which had taken the first-ever initiative in the post-World War II period to create an all-Asia platform at the Asian Relations Conference in March 1947 where Jawaharlal Nehru had shown the vision to invite leaders of the countries from Syria to Indonesia, found itself not playing a major role as an Asian nation in the discussions during the eighties and early nineties on Asia’s security and development. Interestingly, Jawaharlal Nehru wrote as far back as 1944, in his book The Discovery of India:

“The Pacific is likely to take the place of the Atlantic in the future as the nerve centre of the world. Though not directly a Pacific state, India will inevitably exercise an important influence there. India will also develop as the centre of economic and political activity in the India Ocean area, in Southeast Asia, right up to the Middle East. Her position gives an economic and strategic importance in a part of the world which is going to develop in the future.”\(^8\)

Even today, India, the fourth largest economy in the world in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms and the second largest country (in terms of population) in Asia, is not a member of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). This may

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\(^7\) Ibid.

\(^8\) Devare, Sudhir (2006), "India and South East Asia: Towards Security Convergence, Institute of South East Asian Studies."
perhaps be attributed to a series of developments in Southeast Asia and the Far East during the Cold War. The latter saw a new alignment of political affiliations and ideological groupings in South and Southeast Asia, especially as Pakistan joined the U.S.-led military alliances, SEATO and CENTO. During and after World War II, the United States had become a principal power in the Pacific and its influence in several countries bordering the Pacific was predominant.

That included Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Thailand, Australia and even Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia, though the latter three were not members of a formal military alliance with the United States. India’s non-aligned status and its perceived proximity to the former Soviet Union was, on the other hand, seen as a cause for distancing it from the affairs of the Asia-Pacific. Added to that was the view that India had become heavily South Asia-centric, was also largely preoccupied with the Gulf countries (especially after the 1973 oil crisis) and as a result, it had little interest or resources to engage itself with the rest of Asia, especially Southeast and East Asia. Moreover, in the eyes of the countries of these regions, India, with its emphasis on “command socialist economy”, had isolated itself from the mainstream of the East Asian economic ethos of liberalization and export-led rapid growth. The chasm between India and Southeast Asia was thus wide and getting wider as a result of which many opportunities for better understanding and co-operation were lost. It was primarily the compelling logic for closer political interaction in the wake of the end of the Cold War and the attractiveness of the marketplace following economic reforms in India in the early 1990s that made some rethinking possible on the two sides.

**Growing Importance of the Asia Pacific Region for India in the 21st century**

Several political, security, economic and socio-cultural factors are at play making Asia Pacific a highly dynamic region. India needs to have a long-term strategy to make use of the opportunities arising in the Asia-Pacific while keeping in view the security challenges. The Asia-Pacific is marked by the following key trends: the rise of China; the rebalancing strategy of the US; a regional architecture underpinned by the centrality of ASEAN; the growing importance of the Indian Ocean region and maritime issues; the growing salience of non-traditional security threats.
Rise of China

China's rise has created a flux. An economic giant, with a GDP of USD 7.3 trillion (2011-World Bank) & an annual military expenditure of Yuan 650 billion (approx USD 103 billion) in 2012, China has overtaken Japan in economic and military terms and may overtake the US’ economy in the next 10-20 years depending upon the growth rate differential between the two countries.

China’s rise is altering the balance of power globally & regionally. The confidence in China's peaceful rise and peaceful development has been seriously dented due to rising tensions in the South China Sea and in the East China Sea. The new leadership is nationalistic & sharply focused on China’s ‘core’ interests.

China's rapid military modernization and projection of its power beyond immediate neighbourhood and in the West Pacific has raised apprehensions among its neighbours. It has developed a powerful navy – with aircraft carriers, submarines, anti-ship missiles– which is rivalling that of Japan and the US. China is following Anti-Access Anti-Denial (A2D) strategy to deter the US from entering the island chain in the area of Chinese influence.

The rising tide of nationalism in China has caused anxieties among neighbours. China’s formulations on ‘core’ interests with an attendant focus on sovereignty, has created doubts in the minds of the neighbouring countries about China’s intentions. China regards the South China Sea as its internal waters. This will have a major impact not only in the neighbourhood but also for international shipping.

On the flip side, it must also be recognized that China’s rise has also benefited the neighbours, particularly in the economic field. For most countries, China is number one trading partner. China-ASEAN trade is $380 billion. The ASEAN economies have got integrated with that of China. People-to-people contacts between China and its neighbours have also deepened with greater connectivity, openness and transparency.

China is getting integrated with the regional architectures. This has increased China’s role in regional stability. For instance, China has an FTA (*Free Trade Agreements*) with ASEAN. The ASEAN countries are part of a global supply chain which passes through China to global...
markets. Thus the economic and social interdependence has increased. China is participating in RCEP (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership) negotiations. RECP will bring about a higher level of economic integration between the ASEAN, China, Japan, Australia and India.

The future is uncertain. China’s economic performance is suspect and riddled with many problems. How long will China maintain its growth and what will be the impact of the slowdown of the Chinese economy in the region will be worth studying? China presents a complex picture. The talk of containment of China is problematic given the growing interdependence between China and most major economies of the region.

**US rebalancing strategy**

The US has been a key player in the security and economic architecture of the region. The biggest challenge before the US is to adjust to the rise of China. Having got entrapped in the highly expensive wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and having been affected by the economic slowdown, the US is in a perilous condition. The US has been compelled to reduce its defence budget due to lack of resources.

Many analysts believe that the US is declining vis-à-vis China although it will remain a military and economic power in the foreseeable future. The US also has the ability to bounce back due to its vast capabilities in innovation. Yet, according to some conjectures, China will overtake the US as number one economy in the next two decades. That will be an important psychological moment for the world.

Beset by fundamental changes in the international order, the US has signalled a shift in its policies towards Asia. Doubts have arisen among the US allies in its ability to shore up its key military alliances in the region, for instance, with Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Australia and Thailand. Faced with a rising China and the declining US, many countries are adopting hedging strategies vis-à-vis China. Essentially most of the countries are seeking greater engagement with China while being on guard against its assertiveness.

The US has declared a policy of rebalancing and pivoting to Asia. The policy is imprecise and created considerable confusion. Did the US ever leave Asia? If not, why is this talk of a return to
Asia? What will be the nature of the US defence postures? Will the 60:40 ratio in military deployments between Asia and the rest of the world be sufficient to strengthen the US defence in Asia Pacific?

In recent times the rebalancing strategy has been further elaborated by officials in Obama 2 administration. Economic and cultural dimensions of the strategy have been elaborated. The aim of rebalancing strategy has been defined to be the strengthening of the existing alliances, searching for new partners (India, Indonesia), forging economic partnerships (TPP) and achieving a constructive relationship with China.

But, Beijing has taken rebalancing as an attempt to contain China. It clearly is suspicious of the US partnerships especially the one with India. The Chinese are developing their own A2D strategies to prevent the US from coming too close to the Chinese shores. The Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea, East China Sea and other areas are part of its strategy to keep the US away and to signal Chinese area of influence.

The US is concerned about China but it has to avoid open confrontation. The US statements on China indicate the US’ desire to engage with China as deeply as practical. The strategic and economic dialogue between the two countries has been institutionalised. Yet, the relationship between the two countries is far from smooth. Elements of competition and confrontation are manifest in the US-China relations. The rest of the world is also unsure about the direction in which the US-China relationship is proceeding.

How are other countries readjusting?

It is in this shifting background that other countries are adjusting their policies.

a. The ASEAN Region, traditionally a region divided by numerous internal fault lines, has sought to put its act together particularly since the 1997 Asian financial crisis. ASEAN countries have sought to resolve their disputes through consensus and dialogue. They have engaged with the outside world while emphasising the ASEAN centrality in so far as their region is concerned. With a combined GDP of over $2 trillion (2011) and total trade of $2.4 trillion (2011), ASEAN has emerged as a formidable economic force. Yet
stability in ASEAN is crucially dependent upon internal as well as external factors. China and the US factors have brought ASEAN to a crossroads. ASEAN unity is under strain. Vietnam and the Philippines are directly affected by China's rise. The South China Sea is a hotspot of tension and is likely to remain so. The mistrust between China and ASEAN is increasing because of South China Sea issues.

The establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015 is a major milestone in the regional economic integration agenda in ASEAN, offering opportunities in the form of a huge market of US$2.6 trillion and over 622 million people. In 2014, AEC was collectively the third largest economy in Asia and the seventh largest in the world.\(^9\) ASEAN+6 have Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) even as the US is pushing for a Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) which excludes China. Some countries like Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia and Indonesia have doubts about joining the TPP negotiations.

b. **Japan** is getting revitalised. The Prime Minister Abe is determined to restore Japan’s primacy. Japan’s New Defence Policy guidelines indicate that Japan is likely to devote increasing attention to recrafting its military strategy and enhancing its defence postures. China’s assertiveness and North Korea’s nuclear programme are serious security concerns for Japan. In the altered scenarios, Japan is focusing on India as a security partner. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s visit to Japan got worldwide headlines as it signalled deepening of India-Japan strategic and security partnership. Prime Minister Abe is reported to have proposed “a strategy whereby Australia, India, Japan and the US state of Hawaii form a diamond to safeguard the maritime commons stretching from the Indian Ocean region to the Western Pacific… I am prepared to invest to the greater possible extent, Japan’s capabilities in this security diamond.” The Indian Prime Minister spoke of India and Japan as “natural and indispensable partners for…a peaceful, stable, cooperative and prosperous future for the Asia-Pacific and the Indian Ocean regions.” Clearly, India-Japan relations are important in the context of peace and stability in Asia-Pacific.

c. **Australia**

It would be useful to see how Australia is adjusting to the rise of China. Australia sees opportunities for itself in the so-called “Asian Century”. It welcomes the rise of China and accepts its military growth as “natural”. Australia is pulling out all stops to deepen its relations with China at every level. At the same time, Australia is also hedging against China by building its own defence capabilities and supporting US rebalancing & pivoting to the Asia-Pacific. It is seeking partnerships with India, Japan and South Korea. In particular, Australia takes note of India’s growing strategic weight in the region and assigns special importance to India in the context of “Indo-Pacific”. It regards Indian and Pacific oceans as “one strategic arch”. India needs to deepen its relations with Australia, particularly in the context of Australia’s emergence as a major supplier of coal and possibly uranium in the future. Australia is also helping India in education and skill developments.

d. **South Korea**

South Korea faces a volatile security environment, particularly in the context of North Korea’s nuclear and missile programme and its unpredictable behaviour. South Koreans pay major emphasis on the protection of the sea lanes of communication in the East Asian region and seek cooperation with India in this regard. They also take note of Chinese hegemonic outlook in the region. While maintaining close ties with India, the Cheonan incident and Yeon Pyieng Island shelling in 2010 have highlighted the increasing military trend in that area. The RoKs realise heavily on international maritime lanes and shipping. In recent track-2 level discussions, South Koreans have underscored desirability of a cooperative mechanism and dialogue between RoK and the Indian Navy; institutionalising an official bilateral mechanism for planning and coordination of maritime issues on the lines of an annual maritime dialogue. The South Koreans also want maritime cooperation with India such as joint naval exercises.
Opportunities for India

The PM’s visit to Japan in May 2013 has been commented upon widely. Strong strategic relationship with Japan is in India’s favour. India has strategic partnerships with the US, Japan, South Korea and Australia. These countries want to have closer security cooperation, particularly in the maritime sector. India-Japan-US trilateral dialogue should focus on Asia-Pacific issues including security cooperation. These partnerships would promote stability in the region. China should realise that India has legitimate interests in the region.

What should be India’s long-term strategy in Asia-Pacific? With the shift of the centre of gravity to the Asia-Pacific region, India must seek a role in the shaping of political, economic, social and security process in the region. Not doing so could adversely affect India’s interests. India’s strategy should be to seek deeper engagement & economic integration with the Asia-Pacific region. India should be particularly engaged in the security dialogues and processes in the region.

India enjoys high credibility in ASEAN and East Asia. India and ASEAN have raised their partnership to the strategic level. The challenge is to deepen it further.

The ASEAN-India Commemorate Summit Vision Statement\(^{10}\) has identified a number of projects for cooperation in the fields of political and security, economic, socio-cultural and developmental, connectivity in regional architecture. Earlier, the ASEAN-India Eminent Persons Report (2013) had identified even a larger spread of projects for cooperation. Thus, there is no dearth of ideas. However, what is required is the identification of resources, establishment of the institutional framework, monitoring mechanisms, coordination etc. to ensure a timely implementation of these projects.

The next big trend in ASEAN region will be ASEAN economic union & RCEP (*Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership*). This will open up opportunities for India. The success of ASEAN-India cooperation will depend upon how rapidly the two sides move towards economic integration through FTA in services and in future through RCEP. India has yet to weigh the costs & benefits of joining the RCEP. The connectivity between ASEAN and India has been talked

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about for a long time but the progress has been slow. Similarly, the regional cooperation, particularly within the framework of BIMSTEC and Ganga-Mekong Cooperation, the Trilateral Highway etc. has also been slow. The two sides need to focus on implementation issues.

One of the weaknesses of India’s Look East Policy has been the relatively less involvement of India’s North East in it. This lacuna must be addressed urgently. The benefits of the Look East Policy, particularly, the increased trade, better connectivity, greater socio-cultural links, cooperation in the area of capacity building, education, youth etc. must be felt by the people of North East, who are otherwise sceptical of the LEP. Therefore, it is essential that the governments in the North East and the social and cultural institutions in the region should be involved in the formulation and implementation of India-ASEAN policies. Of the numerous activities outlined in the Vision Statement, some should be based in the North Eastern states. For instance, an India-ASEAN cultural centre could be set up in Guwahati. Similarly, Imphal could host an India-ASEAN sports academy. A study of local cultures can be undertaken through an NE University. A special programme can be designed for capacity building targeting the youth of the North-East. Trade facilitation centres encouraging trade between the North-East and the South-East Asia could be set up in the North-East. The government could also consider setting up the branches of these institutions in the North-East.

The Vision Statement talks about security cooperation between India and ASEAN. An institutional framework needs to be set up for this purpose. For instance, the India-Japan security statement of 2008 could be adopted for India-ASEAN security dialogue and cooperation. This will help set up a broad-based security dialogue between the Indian and ASEAN institutions. India-ASEAN counter-terrorism dialogue should be stepped up & information sharing should be facilitated. Mutual legal assistance treaties and extradition treaties should be set up. Maritime security dialogue should be initiated.

Andaman and Nicobar Islands should be brought into the framework of India-ASEAN relations. Giving due consideration to the concerns of the tribes, it is possible to develop some of the islands, particularly, in Nicobar, for tourism. Nicobari youth are keen to take to modernism. Scholarships for A&N youth could be provided to make them a stakeholder.
In terms of trade linkages, the Dawei port offers numerous opportunities. During the Thai Prime Minister India and Thailand agreed to develop Chennai-Dawei corridor project. Dawei is a city in southeastern Myanmar and is the capital of Tanintharyi Region. Myanmar government has already approved plans to develop a large port and industrial estate in Dawei with the Italian-Thai Development Public Company Limited (ITD) as a major contractor. The entire project estimated to be at least US$58 billion. In November 2010, ITD signed a 60-year framework agreement with the Myanmar Port Authority to build a port and industrial estate on 250 square kilometres of land in Dawei. This is likely to transform Thailand into a major transit hub within the East-West Economic Corridor. Japan is also keen to invest in the Dawei project. India must invest in Dawei project as also work on the Chennai-Dawei corridor.

People-to-people connectivity needs to be improved. But this will require liberations of the visa regime between India & ASEAN countries. India needs to pay special attention to Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia and Singapore on a bilateral level. These countries can help India in raising Indian regional profile.

Additionally, India needs to focus on Indian Ocean issues and those of Ocean governance. India needs to take an active role in the shaping of the agenda of IOR-ARC. In recent times the Australians and the Japanese have talked about the concept of Indo-Pacific.

In contemporary times, too, especially after the end of the Cold War, globalization can be identified as one of the factors contributing towards the change of attitude of the countries of East and Southeast Asia towards India and vice versa. Basically, it brought about better communication between the two. Rapid advances in electronic and computer technology, improvement in telecommunications, liberalization of trading regimes and growth in investment flow in East and Southeast Asia was creating circumstances to look for large and still unsaturated markets, and India seemed to meet the requirements. India’s vast consumer market as well as its potential to absorb investments for infrastructure was attractive incentives for the countries of ASEAN to give a closer look to India. Besides, India’s strength in human skills and financial and technical services were beginning to find acceptance in the developed countries, especially in the United States, and through that route, getting recognition in Southeast Asia. The size of India’s economy (in GDP terms, next to Japan, China and Korea), its consistently high growth rate and
rapidly developing strength in IT gave a new perception of India as a rising economic power in the Asia-Pacific.

**Act East Policy: Its implementation and Implication**

In the recent years, there has been a renewed emphasis on Asia-Pacific region in India’s foreign policy. In August 2014, Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj announced that the decades-long “Look East” policy, initiated in 1991-92, would become “Act East” policy”.11 It was followed by the speech of Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the East Asia Summit in Myanmar in November 2014. He formally, asserted India has turned the “Look East” policy into “Act East” policy”.12 While for years India’s position towards the region has not attracted much attention, this is gradually changing. Under the Act East Policy, New Delhi has purposefully intensified its engagement in the Asia-Pacific region. India and countries in the region have come together on a number of issues, ranging from joint military exercises to high-level visits, which illustrate the increasing strength of political and military ties. Having secured the support from the US and some countries in the region, India is now looking to expand its presence in the South China Sea. The Asia-Pacific region has come to have more strategic importance for international society, in part because of China’s rise and the US rebalance to Asia.

- India is not satisfied with being identified as a mere regional power confined in South Asia. Instead, over the last few years, India has signalled a willingness to play a greater strategic role in the Indo-Pacific, building up a partnership with the US, Japan and Vietnam. The rising influence and capability, it seems to be natural to for India to extend its influence beyond the sub- continent. Part of the expectation is that India can play a greater role in the Indo-Pacific.

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- There are several dynamics shaping the contours of the transformation of India’s policy to the Asia-Pacific. First of all, the launch of India’s East Policy reflects India’s rising clout in the world. India’s power has been gradually recognized since the economic reforms and nuclear weaponization.

- The other dynamic for India to pursue a more active Asia-Pacific policy is its lingering threat perception about China’s rise and growing assertiveness. India has been also watchful China’s activities in the Indian Ocean. Most Indian maritime strategists have seen Chinese Navy as the no. 1 threat to India in the Indian Ocean. For example, former Indian Ambassador M K Bhadrakumar deemed that the U.S.’s naval dominance is declining. On the other hand, China’s navy may have more warships than the U.S.’s in the coming decade.

- The famed “string of pearls” strategy and the much-talked-about “One Belt One Road” initiatives, China’s submarines have been spotted more frequently in the Indian Ocean since 2010 and have raised hackles in New Delhi.

- India is not the South China Sea littoral state; there are sound reasons for it to expand its presence in the waters. First, Indian interests are linked to freedom of navigation. An uninterrupted passage of ships for trade in the region is vital to India as more than 40 to 55 percent of India’s trade traverses through the South China Sea. That is, India’s involvement in the South China Sea is partly driven by the needs of its economic development. New Delhi cannot afford to ignore developments in the Asia-Pacific and senses the need to secure India's sea lanes in the South China Sea.

**Evaluation**

- India’s Act East Policy has imparted greater vigour to India’s ties with the US, Japan and some ASEAN states. As a result, it will reduce China’s regional

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16 Yu Yinghong, “YinduModixinzhengfu de dui Hua zhengce,” p.73.
influence.\textsuperscript{17} India’s presence in the region may also impede “China’s peaceful rise”.\textsuperscript{18}

- Beijing considers India’s naval presence in these waters as a provocative and destabilizing act which would automatically raise tensions. Other claimant states in the South China Sea dispute may seek India’s assistance to strength their military capability against China. India’s involvement will contribute to the internationalization of the South China Sea.\textsuperscript{19} India’s engagement with other parties will put a negative impact on China’s sovereignty claims over the South China Sea.

Conclusion

The Asia Pacific region which has become more important in the 21st Century not only because of its strategic importance but for its economic importance as well. The world fastest growing economies have been trying to exert their dominance over this region to harness numerous potential lying in this region. India which has been looking at this region since independence is trying hard/er to register its presence in Asia-Pacific or in other world trying to fulfill the dream of Jawaharlal Nehru in a major shift after the cold war took this country in the nearer to this region and first step was; look east policy in this direction. China on the other hand is the main rival of India in the Asia-Pacific Region. Though, India alone cannot overcome China hence India is trying to resist the Chinese aggression in this particular region by aligning herself with Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, Australia the major players of this region.

The US involvement and its support to India is the another key factor for the India’s rising capabilities in this region. As abovementioned the Aisa Pacific region would be known as a region of ‘clash of amitions and aspirations’ in the present century.

\textsuperscript{17}Ibid. p.74.
\textsuperscript{18}Shi Hongyuan, “Yindu dong jin Nan Zhongguo Hai: yitu, fangshi, jiyinhxiang,” pp.4-22.
\textsuperscript{19}Shi Hongyuan, “Yindu dong jin Nan Zhongguo Hai: yitu, fangshi, jiyinhxiang,” p.19