

Evolving Regional Security Architecture in East Asia

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The Regional Security Architecture in East Asia has been characterized by regional frameworks centered around the ASEAN, the American bilateral alliance system, the United States' Strategic Cooperation with non allied countries, the growing bilateral defense relations between middle powers and the special relationships that continue to exist between former communist bloc countries.

During the 1990s, the ASEAN underwent a major expansion with the entry of Vietnam (1995), Laos (1997), Myanmar (1997) and Cambodia (1999). As a consequence, the ASEAN 10 as we know it today came into being. ASEAN centrality was accepted as a principle by regional and extra-regional powers and ASEAN came to occupy the center stage of the regional security architecture in East Asia. This was reflected in the emergence of a number of ASEAN centric institutions, including the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the ASEAN Plus Three (APT) process, the ASEAN Plus One process, the East Asia Summit (EAS) and the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM+). While each of these forums dealt with distinct aspects of ASEAN's regional outreach, they benefitted from cooperative approaches to building regional confidence and security cooperation and the slow paced, "ASEAN way" of consensus building.

Since its establishment in 1967, the ASEAN has played well above its collective weight in East Asia. However, its reputation for effective diplomatic action was adversely affected by its failure to tackle regional challenges including the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997, East Timor's secession from Indonesia, the annual forest fire haze, the 1997 Cambodian coup that overturned an ASEAN endorsed election, the failure to accelerate the pace of democratization in Myanmar, and the failure to arrive at a consensus on dealing with China on the South China Sea issue.

ASEAN is increasingly confronted by transnational challenges. These include terrorism, illegal arms trafficking, exploitation of ocean resources and maritime cooperation. ASEAN states are trying to

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In keeping with the growing dynamism of India's foreign and security policy, the DPG is expanding its focus areas to include India's broader regional and global role and the strategic partnerships that advance India's rise as a leading power. To support that goal, the DPG undertakes research and organizes policy interactions across a wide canvas, including strategic and geo-political issues, geo-economic issues and defence and security issues.

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overcome these through community wide cooperation on these issues¹.

ASEAN declared Southeast Asia a Nuclear weapons free zone in 1995. This was seen as a logical extension of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, signing which has become a pre requisite for joining the East Asia Summit.

The ASEAN Regional Forum is East Asia's largest platform for discussing security issues. Its membership includes all East Asian States, the EU, the United States, Canada and Russia. The ARF has achieved some success in anti-terrorist collaboration and HADR but made little progress on preventive diplomacy and conflict resolution. The ARF like the ASEAN takes decisions on the basis of consensus, and this has inhibited tangible outcomes on hard security issues.

The East Asia Summit established in 2005 has emerged as the highest-level forum for leaders of East Asia to discuss regional security issues. With the admission of the United States and Russia in 2011, the membership of the EAS includes all great powers with a presence and stake in the security of the region.

Conscious of Asia's economic interdependence and growth potential, leaders of the East Asia Summit have also pushed for greater regional cooperation and economic integration through initiatives like the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

While U.S. participation in the EAS is expected to counter the growing Chinese clout in East Asian affairs, there is a risk that "smaller" regional states will be caught up in the U.S.-China rivalry² - and will eventually be forced to choose sides. Indeed, the US – China tensions within the EAS have prevented it from functioning effectively as a forum for discussing the resolution of hard security issues in East Asia.

East Asia is currently experiencing a radical transformation in its security architecture in the post-cold war era. Countries in East Asia face an increasingly complex and adverse security environment, which is posing a major challenge to their nascent attempts to forge security architecture. What are these factors and how are countries in the region responding to them?

First, there is the not so peaceful rise of China and the geo-strategic shift it is bringing about in East Asia.

Second, the gradual but steady rise of India, a revitalized Japan under PM Shinzo Abe and the US rebalance to Asia are major strategic developments which are shaping responses to the challenge posed by China to the status quo and the post-World War II order in the region. For a majority of the countries in East Asia, there remains the belief that the US and its alliance system as well as its new security relationships with regional powers are here to stay, checking the tendency to capitulate to Chinese hegemony for the present.

Third, ASEAN countries are facing an increasingly difficult and coercive security environment, which includes direct challenges to their territorial integrity, such as in the South China Sea. The growing dependence of regional countries on Chinese finance, capital, manufacturing value chains and trade is increasing their vulnerability and diminishing their capacity to stand up to China³. In the face of these pressures, ASEAN cohesion and unity is cracking and there is a clear division between those countries which are more susceptible to Chinese pressure,⁴ and those which are not. The heightened influence of China is encouraging ASEAN countries to use ASEAN led security institutions and forums in ways that conceal this internal conflict.

Fourth, both small and middle powers in East Asia are counting on the support of the United States to strengthen their defense capabilities and to help in upholding a rule based order and maintaining a stable balance of power in the region⁵.

In November 2011 Secretary Clinton outlined six pillars of the United States' Asia Policy: strengthening Bilateral Security Alliances, deepening cooperative relations with China and other emerging powers, engaging regional multilateral institutions, expanding trade and investment, pursuing a broad-based military presence and strengthening democracy and human rights⁶.

The US rebalancing Strategy has taken the form of increased port calls by Naval vessels and assistance for capacity building. Vital objectives for US policy have been to maintain a rules base order, a resolution of disputes in the South China Sea on the basis of the Law of the Sea, ensure access to sea lanes, meet the Chinese challenge and reiterate the US commitment to Asia.

Fifth, non-traditional security threats are rising. Increasingly, states in East Asia - India, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines - are coming to regard these threats from non-traditional actors as a major challenge to their national security in the 21st century.

Sixth, in response to the ongoing power flux, the United States has strengthened defense and strategic cooperation with allies as well as non-allied partner countries like India and is expanding its military footprint in the region. The United States and India have created a wide-ranging strategic partnership that reflects common principles and values, long term strategic convergence and shared national interests.



Indian Defense Minister Mr Manohar Parrikar and US Defense Secretary Dr Ashton Carter being briefed during a walk-around of the Indian Navy Aircraft Carrier INS Vikramaditya on April 11, 2016. (Source: India Navy)

A Framework for the US India Defense relationship has been in place since 2005 and been upgraded and renewed for a ten year period on June 3, 2015. Under the Framework the military leadership of the two sides has conducted strategic level discussions and exchanged perspectives on international security issues.

The two countries have also participated in bilateral and multilateral exercises, cooperated in military training, combatting terrorism, intelligence sharing, disaster response and in preventing WMD proliferation. They have also worked to expand defense equipment and technology exchanged under the Defense Technology and Trade Initiative.

Seventh, countries in the region are strengthening their individual military capabilities and augmenting bilateral defense cooperation with regional partners. The trend has been reinforced by the failure of regional security institutions like the ARF and the EAS to effectively address hard security issues in the region. Southeast Asian countries are also continuing to comprehensively engage China bilaterally and in multilateral institutions in an effort to balance conflict and competition with economic cooperation⁷.

As a consequence, in recent years India has strengthened defense and security cooperation with Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia at a time when these countries are seeing rising tensions and territorial disputes with China.

India's bilateral defense cooperation with individual ASEAN countries has been institutionalized through the signing of bilateral Defense Cooperation Agreements/ MOUs. Three forms of cooperation have gained momentum – cooperation between the navies, maintenance and supply of equipment and assistance for training.

An outstanding example of India's effort to build closer ties with regional navies is the MILAN exercises that have been held biennially since 1995. Apart from this the Indian Navy ships have regularly made goodwill port calls and conducted joint coordinated patrols with the Navies of Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam⁸.

Training and capacity building assistance has been extended to Myanmar, Vietnam, Indonesia (submarine training), Malaysia (pilot training) and Singapore (use of artillery range and airbase for training purposes).



17 nations, including India, had come together in MILAN 2014 making it the biggest edition since its inception in 1995. (Source: India Navy)

Finally, China continues to play with fire at two ends of the East Asian Region. In South Asia, China's support and encouragement to Pakistan – which has included nuclear and missile proliferation - encourages the latter to indulge in brinkmanship with India. On the Korean peninsula, China's unwillingness or inability to rein in the DPRK allows the latter to engage in nuclear brinkmanship with the ROK, Japan and the US. China has periodically displayed an ability to help defuse crises and bring the DPRK to the Conference table, though without any lasting results. This gives China considerable leverage over those countries – Japan, ROK and the US - which are most affected by the DPRK's rogue state behavior. Nuclear and missile proliferation activities between the DPRK and Pakistan, are another dimension that has been seriously detrimental to India's national security.

One direct consequence of these multiple developments has been that regional powers have reverted to more tried and tested mechanisms for bolstering security, namely bilateral and trilateral defense and security cooperation arrangements with each other. Incipient ASEAN-led regional security forums like the EAS, unable to move beyond a soft security agenda and talk shop status, are being relegated to the margins.

China's growing assertiveness and the uncertainties surrounding US resolve are encouraging countries like India and Australia to strengthen their bilateral security ties. In 2009, the two countries declared a strategic partnership, which included the intention to develop stronger security ties. Since then, they have exchanged Summit level meetings as well as visits of Defense Ministers and have established a number of dialogue platforms, including annual Defense Policy Talks, Service-to-Service Staff Talks, and a Track 1.5 Defense and Strategic Dialogue. They have concluded bilateral MOUs on combating Terrorism, Defense Cooperation and Information Sharing. During the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Australia in November 2014, the two countries announced a Framework for Security Cooperation. India and Australia now work closely on security issues in regional fora like the East Asia Summit, the ARF, the ADMM+, the IORA and the IONS.

The Navies of the two countries have been at the forefront of security cooperation between them. Following a steady stream of goodwill visits by Indian Navy Ships at Australian ports, in 2015 the two Navies organized their first bilateral Naval Exercise IN-RAN in the Bay of Bengal. The special forces of India and Australia are now preparing to hold land combat training exercises in October 2016.

Similarly, Japan and India have been cooperating on defense and security issues since 2001, when the bilateral Comprehensive Security Dialogue was inaugurated. Further institutionalization of bilateral security cooperation has continued since, with the two countries concluding a Defence Cooperation agreement in May 2005, a Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation in October 2008, an Action Plan for Security Cooperation in December 2009, and commencing a bilateral 2+2 dialogue in 2009.

The India-Japan Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation of 2008 set up comprehensive consultation mechanisms between the Defense establishments of the two countries including visits by Defense Ministers, Defense Policy Talks, Military to Military Staff Talks, service to service exchanges and bilateral and multilateral exercises.

In December 2015, India and Japan signed an Agreement on Defense Equipment and Technology Transfer and another on Security Measures for the Protection of Classified Military Information. They are presently discussing the initiation of military sales and technology transfer.

Meeting in Singapore on June 4, 2016, the Defense Ministers of the two countries had agreed to enhance trilateral Defense Cooperation between India, Japan and the United States.



Japanese Defense Minister Gen Nakatani calls on Prime Minister Modi during his visit to India on July 14, 2016 (Source: narendramodi.in)

During the visit of the Japanese Defense Minister Gen Nakatani to India on July 13-15, 2016 there was shared recognition that imperatives of a stronger bilateral strategic partnership require deep and broad based cooperation and concrete actions in defense and security fields. The two sides resolved to work together to respond to global and regional challenges and jointly contribute to the peace, stability and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific region.

The two Ministers reiterated their desire to deepen cooperation in countering terrorism, expressed grave concern at the DPRK's continued WMD related proliferation activities, recognized the importance of security and stability in the South China Sea and urged respect for UNCLOS and noted the Award of the Arbitral Tribunal on the South China Sea.

The two leaders acknowledged the importance of ASEAN centered Dialogue mechanisms dealing with security issues. They agreed to continue high level exchanges between the SDF and the three Indian armed services. They expressed satisfaction at the trilateral maritime exercise Malabar and agreed to explore the possibility of a joint bilateral exercise between the two Navies.

Under Prime Minister Modi, India has pursued the "Act East" policy with renewed vigor and has actively sought defense and security partners in the East Asian region. In doing so, India has progressively advanced her security objectives and those of her partners while seeking to reduce the diplomatic and military space of certain countries which are resorting to the use of bullying tactics and creeping aggression in order to seize territory in an attempt establish regional hegemony and to overturn the existing regional order.

India continues to make an important contribution to the upholding of a rules based regional order while continuing to build capacity for net security provision that provides assurance to neighbors in Southeast Asia. This approach reflects India's growing contributions to the building of a stronger, more equitable, stable and secure Regional Security Architecture in Asia.

References:

¹ For example trilateral cooperation between Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia in Malacca Straits to tackle the piracy issue.

² In fact, this is already happening with the emergence of cracks in ASEAN unity on the South China Sea issue

³ After the PCA ruling on the Philippines complaint relating to maritime claims in the South China Sea, the ASEAN Foreign Ministers met in Vientiane on June 25-26, 2016. Under pressure from China through its proxy Cambodia the ASEAN Ministers were forced to exclude a reference to the PCA Court ruling in their Joint Statement. Similarly, at the Kunming Meeting of ASEAN Foreign Ministers and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, on June 14, ASEAN Foreign Ministers first issued and then retracted a joint statement drafted by them. It is believed that statement included formulations on the South China Sea issues critical of Chinese positions and drew a private protest from the Chinese side and that, the Chinese viewpoint was advocated by the Cambodian and Laotian Foreign Ministers within the ASEAN group. There was a similar incident in 2012 when ASEAN Foreign Ministers meeting in Cambodia failed to issue a Statement at the end of the meeting for the first time owing to a lack of unity on the South China Sea Issue.

⁴ Cambodia and Laos are regarded as being susceptible to Chinese pressure

⁵ There is a need for a legally binding Code of Conduct (CoC) to replace the 2002 Declaration on the Code of Conduct (DoC) which was voluntary in nature.

⁶ Article by Secretary Clinton in the November 2011 issue of Foreign Policy

⁷ For Example India has done well in managing her boundary dispute with China while expanding trade and investment with China and cooperating with China on a range of global issues.

⁸ In the case of Vietnam patrols are conducted by the Coast Guard and the Vietnamese police.



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