

LOOK EAST POLICY OF INDIA & PAKISTAN: A COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW

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Abstract

Influenced by the developments after the end of cold war, various countries had to reorient their foreign policies throughout the world to adjust them into the new world order. Similarly, India, who has been associated with the former Soviet Union and other western countries for all types of interaction, also paid attention to the countries of Asia Pacific. India developed its 'Look East Policy' in the early 1990s to meet its multidimensional policy objectives. On the other hand, Pakistan developed its policy, 'Strategic Vision East Asia' in 2003. India was almost a decade ahead to Pakistan in its policy of looking east. No wonder, taking advantages of its early initiative India has achieved maximum goals of its look east policy. Unlike India, Pakistan is still in its infancy stage of stabilizing ties with the countries of this region. This article aims to make comparative view of the look east policy of both the countries. In introductory paragraph push & pull factors for both countries will be discussed. In proceeding paragraphs their initiatives and achievements will be discussed. Before conclusion, an attempt will be made to suggest some policy recommendations for Pakistan.

Look East Policy of India

The nature of international system, as well as the regional strategic paradigms, significantly, influences the foreign policy posture of countries. Very often these factors dictate to the policy makers to mould their policies according to the emerging scenarios. Similarly, after the collapse of bipolar system at the end of cold war India had to make a significant shift in its policy towards South East Asia.

India launched its Look East Policy in 1992 with an objective of establishing closer economic integration with the Southeast Asian states. After the end of cold war and collapse of Soviet Union it was

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a very strategic policy decision taken by the government of India in its foreign policy.

Actually, the Look East policy is the product of various compulsions, changed perceptions and expectations of India in the changed international environment. The end of cold war brought about a fundamental change in the international system, which focuses on the economic content of relations and led to the burgeoning of the formation of regional economic organisations. While India was opening up to the world market, it became aware of the growing trends towards regionalism and feared that it will be marginalised from the dynamics pushing the global economy. The economic reforms, coupled with the integrative forces of globalisation; frustration with the process of integration within South Asia and the renewed concern about the antecedent and powerful China and its impact on India's security, as well as India's unease at Beijing's growing assertiveness in the Asia-Pacific region made India to rethink the basic parameters of its foreign policy. In this changed international system in the aftermath of the cold war, the success stories of the East Asian Tiger economies and the radical shift in India's economic and strategic circumstances caused New Delhi to pay more attention to the rapidly growing economies of Southeast and East Asia¹. Moreover, internally, India wanted to connect its remote and isolated North Eastern Region with the rest of the country. Therefore, it was considered to be a significant shift in India's policy prioritization because hitherto India did not have any concrete strategy to create an economic hub in its North Eastern Region by exploiting the trade and commerce potential with its ASEAN neighbors². Because, the policy holds the potential to make North East Region (NER) the commercial corridor of India linking the ASEAN nations enabling its people to harvest economic well-being through trade, transit and tourism. NER then will no longer wilt in isolation and remoteness but prosper with business opportunities knocking at the door³.

Hitherto India had a very limited cooperation with the countries of South East Asia. With the formation of the look east policy in the 1990s, India had started giving this region due importance in the foreign policy⁴. As a result of this initiative on the part of India, it has achieved significant success in its bid to stabilize its relations with the ASEAN countries. As, this policy was primarily directed towards improving relations with the ASEAN, So, India used bilateral ties with the member countries of this regional organization to become part of it.

As a result of the initiatives taken by Indian policy makers India now reaps the benefits of its look east policy. India enjoys very close and cordial relations, not only with ASEAN but it also enjoys very warm bilateral relations with the member countries of ASEAN.

Consequently, India-ASEAN relations have deepened and intensified significantly in recent years. India became a sectoral dialogue partner of ASEAN in 1992. In 1995 this was upgraded to full dialogue partnership. It participated in the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (AMM), the Post Ministerial Conference (PMC) and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in July 1996. Since 2002, India has annual summits with ASEAN along with China, Japan and Republic of Korea. These political level interactions are further strengthened through the Senior Officials' meetings, as also specialized working groups in functional areas⁵.

Moreover, in demonstrating its commitment and shared interest to ensuring peace, security, stability and development in Southeast Asia, India acceded to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) on 8 October 2003 during the 2nd ASEAN-India Summit in Bali. At the same occasion, ASEAN and India also signed a Joint Declaration for Cooperation in Combating International Terrorism, symbolising concrete initiatives to step up cooperation in the fight against terrorism⁶.

Currently, India enjoys good trade and investment relations as compared to Pakistan, not only with ASEAN but with Asean member countries at bilateral level also. During 2008 India was among the top ten trading partners of the ASEAN. Their total level of trade during 2008 was \$47,465.1 million. That is 2.8% of the total trade of ASEAN. Though the current level of trade between India and ASEAN is not impressive but keeping in view the active engagement of India in the South East Asian region and positive response from the host countries, it is expected that the level of trade between the two will increase at the unprecedented level in future. Similarly, India's recently signed free trade agreement (FTA) with the Association of South East Asian Nations (though initially in goods) is also expected to boost economic exchange with the trade block. The signing of the ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement paves the way for the creation of one of the world's largest free trade areas (FTA) – a market of almost 1.8 billion people with a combined GDP of US\$ 2.75 trillion. The ASEAN-India FTA will see tariff liberalisation of over 90% of products traded between the two including the so-called "special products," such as palm oil (crude and refined), coffee, black tea and pepper. Tariffs on over 4,000 product lines will be eliminated by 2016, at the earliest. The ASEAN-India TIG Agreement entered into force on 1 January 2010⁷. Once the deal becomes fully operational, trade with the block is expected to reach \$70 billion within the next five years⁸. It is hoped that this will prove a long in strengthening the trade and economic relations between India and Asean.

Look East Policy of Pakistan

So far as the policy of Pakistan in this regard is concerned, unlike India, Pakistan's policy of looking east is more recent. Pakistan developed its "Strategic Vision East Asia" policy in 2003. Growing international compulsions after unfortunate 9/11 attacks, economic growth of the South East Asian countries and search for new trade

partners led Pakistani policy makers to adopt this policy. Specially, in current scenario where Asia is emerging as a dominating force in the world politics, policy makers in Pakistan also responded to this emerging situation and developed a policy to adjust Pakistan in emerging Asian century. As a part of this policy, ASEAN- one of the main actors in the emerging Asia- was chosen for all types of cooperation. However, as compared to India, Pakistan's policy of looking east is in infancy stage.

Pakistan's Strategic Vision East Asia" aims to achieve multi-dimensional cooperation of the countries of the South East Asian region to its maximum advantage. The purpose of Vision East Asia was to explore new areas of cooperation in South East Asia in response to the 'emerging strategic and economic compulsions to enhance country's economic and political profile in the Asian continent⁹. The vision also aimed at building comprehensive, constructive, and structural partnership in the field of business, trade, investment, and economic cooperation in the South East Asia. However, the prime objective of this policy was to strengthen ties with the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Therefore, in order to boost up the ties with the ASEAN, and to rally the support of the Asean member countries to earn the status of Full Dialogue Partner (FDP) in ASEAN, Pakistan developed Vision East Asia policy in 2003 to make use of its bilateral relations with the South East Asian countries for this purpose.

As a result of the initiatives taken by Pakistan to achieve full cooperation of Asean, Pakistan was awarded the membership in Asean Regional Forum (ARF). Pakistan also acceded to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) as well as signed a Joint Declaration to Combat Terrorism with ASEAN¹⁰. But the full advantage of the ASEAN membership can be obtained by the non-ASEAN members by being Full Dialogue Partner FDP¹¹. Pakistan had been aspiring for the status of Full Dialogue Partner (FDP) of Asean since very long

but so far has failed to acquire that status.

Various factors influence the course of foreign policies. Similarly, in case of India its geographic location has worked in its favor. Geographic location of India helps it to maintain land links with the countries of this region. Specially, its land link with Myanmar is facilitating India in its search for energy resources in Myanmar. Similarly, Location of Pakistan can not be ignored either. It is ideal for countries of this region to reach central Asia, Middle East and Europe via Gawadar port.

But the image problem has always worked against Pakistan in the comity of nations. Pakistan's alleged links with Taliban and Al Qaeda have really affected its relations with rest of the world. Specially, countries in this region, who are themselves, victimized by some terrorist groups in their territories with alleged links with Al Qaeda and trainings in camps inside Pakistan, were very much conscious while establishing any relations with Pakistan. However, Pakistan's role in war against international terrorism has restored its image in international relations. Inspired by the meaningful role of Pakistan in war against terrorism countries of this region are hoping for Pakistan's help and expertise to deal with such militant groups at their home fronts.

It is interesting to note here that in the recent scenario after the tragic incidents of 9/11, countries of this region seem to be more interested and convinced for strong and long lasting relations with Pakistan. That is primarily because of Pakistan's geo-strategic location. Pakistan's geo-strategic location has always been attractive for the countries of this region. Pakistan is well placed to bring South and East Asia as well as West Asia closer. In addition, Pakistan's close relations with the countries of Middle East is also driving the countries of Southeast Asian region closer to Pakistan as they want access to the Middle Eastern markets¹². In this regard, Gawadar Port- a hub of economic activities in future - is well placed to

facilitate trade of South East Asian countries with the countries of Middle East and central Asia. More recently, Pakistan's performance in war against terrorism had increased its importance in this region. Pakistan's contribution towards war against international terrorism has earned it good will and prestige among the countries of Far East and Southeast Asia. Since these countries are themselves faced with terrorist threats, therefore, they are interested in closer cooperation with Pakistan to share intelligence, expertise and experience in combating terrorism¹³. Besides, the presence and activities of Islamic terrorist groups in the South-East Asian Region have also led these nations to hope for Pakistan's support and expertise in dealing with them¹⁴. Expression of interest by the countries of this region in Pakistan was evident from their postures when they welcomed Pakistan's all types of initiatives of its Vision East Asia Policy. Consequently, they signed various types of agreements with Pakistan. Pakistan signed MoU for combating terrorism with all four countries and concluded talks on free trade agreements and preferential trade arrangements. These moves of Pakistan were followed by signing of free trade agreement FTA between Pakistan and Malaysia in November 2007. While talks on FTAs with other countries of this region are yet to bear fruits. However, if we look at the current level of trade between Asean and Pakistan it is not impressive.

As compared to India the level of trade between Pakistan and Asean is very low. During the year 2008 total trade between Pakistan and Asean amounted \$4,843.5 million that is 0.3% of the total trade of Asean. Obviously, that is not impressive figure. However, keeping in view the potential of trade between the two parties the level of trade can be further improved to impressive point.

Look east policy of India and Pakistan has different backgrounds. However, the objectives of their policies are similar. Pushed and pulled by different factors, both of them are striving hard to find strong footings in this region. Some factors have worked in favor of

India to facilitate its relations with the countries of this region as well as with Asean. Hence, India is able to reap the benefits of its early initiatives to have strong and cordial relations with the countries of this part of world. Given the active engagement of India and its active participation in the Asean activities, India has become a reality in this region. The positive response from the countries of this region is partly driven by their apprehensions about the growing influence of China in the region. In fact they want to balance China as to avoid its hegemony in future. While, Pakistan is decade behind India in this regard. Pakistan's policy of looking east is still in infancy stage. It will take lot of time and attention to be mature. Traditionally Pakistan has been allied with the western countries for all types of interactions. In the process this region could not attend the due concentration of the policy makers of Pakistan. Moreover, during this time Pakistan's relations with western countries especially with USA were not seen as a good posture by the countries of South East Asia. However, after realizing the importance of this region and compelled by some push factors, policy makers of Pakistan devised a policy to reach this part of world. Countries of this region were also ready to accept Pakistan inspired by its change in policies.

Recommendations

- * Pakistan should exploit the bilateral ties with the member countries of Asean to acquire the status of full dialogue partner FDP in Asean because it will enable Pakistan to benefit from the Asean
- * Current level of trade between Asean and Pakistan is not so impressive. So Pakistan needs to increase its efforts to enhance the level of trade. Once again the bilateral ties of member countries of Asean should be exploited to sign free trade agreement (FTA) with Asean. It will prove a long way to boost the level of trade between the two. Trade fairs and exhibitions in the member countries will also help to improve level of trade.

- * People to people contacts and cultural exchange progress should be initiated as these will facilitate the relationship between Pakistan and Asean and will help both to benefit mutually. It creates environment of mutual trust and understanding.
- * Pakistan should continue to play its role in war against terrorism because it will help to remove the misperceptions against Pakistan.
- * Pakistan needs to revive and strengthen its ties with the countries of South East Asia, which could serve as a good spring board for future expansion.

Conclusion

India developed its look policy in early 1990s influenced by external as well as internal factors. The main objective of India was to get entry into the ASEAN along with stabilizing ties with the member countries of this organization. Apparently, India was driven by its economic, political and strategic interests. In its round about two decades old policy India has achieved significant progress. Current pace of Indian engagement with the member countries of the Asean and the ASEAN itself is witness to the fact. Pakistan developed its policy "Strategic Vision East Asia" in 2003- almost a decade behind India. Following this policy Pakistan strives to strengthen its ties with the countries of South East Asia. Moreover, by utilizing its bilateral ties with the member countries of Asean, Pakistan wanted to get entry into ASEAN. So far Pakistan has been able to become sectoral dialogue partner of Asean and became member of ARF. However, if due attention is paid to this part of the world then further progress can be expected.

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