

PAKISTAN'S VISION EAST ASIA POLICY: A RESPONSE TO THE POST 9/11 SCENARIO

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Abstract

9/11 attacks left tremendous effects on the world politics. Many countries in the world had to redesign and redefine their foreign policies to respond the environment created under influence of the fall out of these attacks. Similarly, Pakistan also had to take review of its policy options and choices to adjust itself in the post 9/11 scenario. Thus, as a response to post the 9/11 environment in world politics, Pakistan's policy makers developed "Pakistan's Vision East Asia Policy" in 2003 to deal the situation created after September 2001. Though Pakistan enjoyed good relations with some countries of this region but they were bilateral in nature. It was for the first time that a comprehensive policy was devised to reach out the countries in the Southeast Asian region to forge not only bilateral but also close multilateral relations. Hither to Pakistan's main focus has been western countries for all types of interactions. As a consequence of Pakistan's traditional policy of looking west, its relations with the countries of Southeast Asian region could not be developed warmly. It was because of the circumstances after 11th September 2001 that pushed Pakistan towards this region. This article aims to define Pakistan's Vision East Asia Policy in introductory paragraph. Then in subsequent paragraph the factors will be discussed which compelled Pakistan to develop this policy. The next paragraph will take review of this policy along with its comparison with India's Look East Policy. Before conclusion this article will suggest some policy recommendations for Pakistan.

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Introduction

Pakistan developed its vision East Asia policy in 2003 to establish close and cordial relations with the countries of Southeast Asia. The purpose of Vision East Asia was to explore new areas of cooperation in East Asia in response to the 'emerging strategic and economic compulsions to enhance country's economic and political profile in the region' and to 'integrate itself in the processes unfolding in greater East Asia, which are acquiring increasing economic and political weight'. The vision aimed at building comprehensive, constructive, and structural partnership in the field of business, trade, investment, and economic cooperation in East Asia by encompassing 'strong relations with countries of the region both at bilateral and multilateral level'. So this policy aims to seek bilateral and multilateral relations with the countries of Southeast Asia to achieve multidimensional cooperation. This was not the first time that Pakistan expressed its interest in this region. Even before this Pakistan enjoyed normal relations with countries of this region specially Indonesia, Japan, Brunei and Malaysia bilaterally but in the post 9/11 period it is more relevant to make their relations stronger. This policy has got much importance in recent years; therefore, it is appropriate time to boost their relations to reach new heights of cooperation in various fields. Except these countries Pakistan lacked warm relations with rest of the countries of this region. Further, Pakistan has been dealing with the countries in this region bilaterally but under this policy Pakistan not only seeks bilateral cooperation but also multilateral cooperation on the platform of ASEAN.

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. However, Pakistan became member of Asean Regional Forum (ARF) in 2004. Pakistan is now a member of the Asian Cooperation Dialogue (ACD), Asean Regional Forum (ARF) and Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) and had acceded to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation as well as signed a Joint Declaration to Combat

Terrorism with Asean³. But the full advantage of the ASEAN membership can be obtained by the non-ASEAN members by being Full Dialogue Partner FDP⁴. Therefore, it was also part of this policy to rally the support of the Asean member countries to earn the status of Full Dialogue Partner FDP in ASEAN.

Push and pull factors

In the age of globalization a single incident or event in the one part of the world can have significant positive or negative impact on the rest of world depending upon its nature. We witnessed exactly the same situation after the attacks on twin towers of the World Trade Centre in New York on 11th September 2001. This incident left tremendous impact on the world politics. Throughout world most of the countries were immensely influenced by the fallout of these attacks directly or indirectly. Similarly Pakistan also could not escape the impact of the fallout of these attacks. After these attacks Pakistan was the first country to be asked for joining the war against terrorism which Pakistan did immediately. In fact, Pakistan had to take U-turn in its policy versus Afghanistan. Thus, the post 9/11 scenario compelled Pakistan to redesign its foreign policy. The circumstances after 9/11 created a problematic situation for Pakistan. Externally Pakistan was under pressure to fight war against terrorism and with each passing day it was urged to 'do more'. Now the nature of Pakistan's relations with its traditional friends came to be determined by its performance in the war against terrorism. Its traditional friends were more in demanding mode in their relations with Pakistan. So, politically Pakistan was under pressure to go hand in hand with the rest of the world in the war against terrorism. This situation had economic dimension as well. Almost all the economic aid and assistance was conditioned with Pakistan's performance in the war against terrorism. Trade and investment opportunities were also subjected to Pakistan's good record in this war against international terrorism. So, the conditional political and economic cooperation of western countries created a complex situation for

Pakistan. This situation had internal dimension also. Because conditional aid, economic assistance, trade and investment opportunities badly affected Pakistan's internal socio-economic setup. Pakistan's position in relation to its traditional friends in early 2000s exposed its vulnerabilities in relying merely on them. Therefore, there was an urgent need to respond this post 9/11 scenario with pragmatic approach which had created challenging environment for Pakistan. Additionally, various other factors have also pulled Pakistan to find strong footing in this region. Steady and sustained economic growth was a point of major attraction to Pakistan. Successful functioning of Asean has also caught attention of the countries of south Asia. Similarly Pakistan was also inspired by the progressive story of Asean. Moreover, India's growing presence in the Southeast Asian region and consequent benefit of that relationship for India made Pakistan's policy makers realize the potential of this region. So, along with these push and pull factors, this policy was driven by the post 9/11 circumstances as well as by the emerging strategic and economic compulsions of Pakistan. Consequently, Pakistan developed its 'Vision East Asia Policy' in 2003.

Policy initiatives

Following this policy high level state visits were paid to the countries of the Southeast Asian region to materialize this policy. In this regard the then prime minister of Pakistan Mr. Shaukat Aziz under took a four-state tour to the four important countries of Southeast Asia: Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Brunei Darussalam in May, 2005. Strategically it was very important tour as it aimed at refreshing and recharging ties with these countries to achieve multidimensional cooperation. During his visit the prime minister of Pakistan mustered the support of host countries for acquiring the status of Full Dialogue Partner FDP in Asean. He also concluded agreements with these four countries on various matters. Free trade agreements, cooperation in fields of technology, offering investment

opportunities and combating terrorism were also topics of discussion during his visit. In the course of his visits, Mr. Aziz not only put forth a proposal for cooperation in combating terrorism but also initiated talks for free trade agreements (FTAs) and preferential trading arrangements (PTAs) with these nations of Southeast Asia to boost Pakistan's economy⁵.

The prime minister of Pakistan successfully got the support of these four host countries in his bid for FDP status. Malaysia, Brunei, Thailand, and Singapore assured Pakistan of their support for acquiring the status of free trade partner (FDP) for Pakistan. It was very good achievement because, it was also on the insistence of these countries including Indonesia that Pakistan was awarded membership of Asean Regional Forum (ARF) in 2004. Definitely, the support of these four nations for Pakistan to acquire the status of FDP will prove to be decisive factor in Pakistan's position in the Asean region. FDP status will bring a lot of opportunities for Pakistan as it will enable her to penetrate the large ASEAN market. It is expected to increase free flow of goods between Pakistan and Asean countries that in turn will boost up the level of trade volume between Asean members and Pakistan.

During this visit Pakistan was received with a greater response. Because host countries show greater interest in Pakistan's invitation for free trade agreements, investment opportunities and other fields. In fact, these countries were inspired by Pakistan's liberal trade policies during these years. Particularly, 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 Asia⁶. Since these countries are themselves faced with terrorist threats, they sought closer cooperation with Pakistan to share intelligence, expertise and experience in combating terrorism⁷. Therefore, the presence and activities of Islamic terrorist groups in the South-East Asian Region have led these nations to hope for

Pakistan's support and expertise in dealing with them. In this context, the Pakistan PM's Proposal to sign a declaration on combating terrorism with the ASEAN was an apt initiative⁸. Moreover, 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 Middle Eastern markets⁹. So, the look east bid of Pakistan got positive response from the countries of this region due to said various factors. Leaders of Pakistan also successfully projected the geo-strategic and commercial importance of Pakistan for the Southeast Asian region during their visits to the countries of this region. 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. In fact, assurance of host governments to support Pakistan's bid for full dialogue partnership status with Asean and agreement on early conclusion of free trade agreements (FTA) with these four countries were major achievements for Pakistan in context of its Vision East Asia Policy. These endeavors 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.

Soon after Mr. Aziz's visit, the then president of Pakistan General Pervaiz Musharraf paid a state visit to Philippines as a part of Pakistan's Vision East Asia Policy. In the course of his visit the president of Pakistan concluded four agreements on various issues. These include MoU on combating terrorism and certain other crimes, abolition of visa requirements for holders of diplomatic passports,

cultural exchange program and for the enhancement bilateral trade; the two countries also signed a MoU formalizing the business agreements between the Philippine International Trading Corp [PITC. and United Marketing of Pakistan¹⁰. It proved to be another important step on the part of the government of Pakistan to materialize its Vision East Asia policy.

The present government in Pakistan has also shown its resolve to take all necessary steps in pursuit of its Vision East Asia Policy. But so far no comprehensive strategy has been devised to maintain the pace of this policy as initiated by the previous government. The prime minister of Pakistan Mr. Yousif Raza Gillani visited Malaysia last year in 2008 but that visit was just for attending the D-8 summit held in Malaysia. So, the government of Pakistan also needs to carry out the remaining work of its policy of Vision East Asia which was initiated by the previous government. Because any delay on Pakistan's side may result in big gap in this policy in the context of India's Look East Policy. A look at the India's policy of looking east will reveal the developments it has made in this direction.

India's Look East Asia Policy

Keeping in view the changed mode of world politics in the early 1990s after the disintegration of the former Soviet Union, where world was transforming from bipolar to unipolar world, Indian policy makers brought a timely shift in their policy and they thought it feasible to find footings in the Southeast Asian region. India was mainly driven by economic interests in this region because countries of this region were progressing smoothly so India wanted to learn their experience. Expansion of trade, investment or technical cooperation was regarded as the key to developing closer relations the countries of southeast and east Asia¹¹. So their policy bore good results for India and today it enjoys cordial relations with the countries of this region bilaterally as well as multilaterally with ASEAN. India's cultural and historical links with the countries of

this region along with its geographic location has greatly helped India to establish close relations with the countries of this region. Further, the presence of Indian population in many countries of this region has also facilitated Indian relationship with the countries of this region to a greater extent. As a result of the contribution of these factors, India was able to cement close and long term ties with the countries of this region. Today India enjoys trade and investment opportunities of this region just because of its timely look east policy. It has signed various agreements in different fields with countries of this region.

While dealing with countries of this region no country can afford to ignore most vibrant organization of this region, ASEAN. Relations with Southeast Asian nations cannot be developed in isolation with ASEAN. Therefore, India developed two pronged policy to attain close relationship with the countries in this region. On the one hand, it developed strong and multidimensional ties with countries in this region in individual capacity, while on the other hand, she also got platform of ASEAN with the support of the Southeast Asian countries. India's bilateral relations with the member countries of ASEAN proved to be a catalyst for acquiring status of FDP- full dialogue partner- in ASEAN. India became Sectoral Dialogue partner of ASEAN in 1993 and after three years it got status of full dialogue partner (FDP) of ASEAN. In 1996, India became a member of Asean Regional Forum, aimed at confidence building, conflict resolution, and preventive diplomacy¹². And in 2003, India and Asean signed the Asean-India Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Economic Agreement¹³. India's Look East Policy bore good results and as a result of these sorts of arrangements, trade and economic activities between India and Asean as well as among India and member countries of Asean have got further impetus. India can easily reach the markets of Southeast Asian countries and vice versa. Moreover, investment and joint ventures is another field where India and Asean countries have made significant developments. Beyond trade, India is a strong political and security partner of Asean¹⁴. That

move on part of India is driven by its Strategic interests in this region. Checking the growing influence of China in this region has always been a top priority of India as well as of America. So following their desire to contain China, India found it wise to seek close cooperation with the countries of Southeast Asia on security front to ensure her presence in the sea waters of Southeast Asia. The expansion of Indian Navy, establishment of Indian Far Eastern command and its warming relations with Southeast Asian states proves that she desires to balance China and act as a local leviathan with the collaboration of the United States (US) in south East Asia¹⁵.

A comparison of Pakistan's Vision East Policy and Look East Policy of India reveals that developed almost a decade ago, India's look east policy is more mature as compared to that of Pakistan's vision east Asia which is more recent. Therefore, no wonder, Pakistan is far behind India in its quest for Southeast Asian region. So, it suggests some policy recommendations for Pakistan to achieve foreseen objectives of its policy within time.

Recommendations

- No country can afford to forge relations with countries of the Southeast Asia in isolation with Asean. Therefore, Pakistan also needs to muster support of its friend countries to acquire status of FDP in Asean. Because, it is necessary for the non-Asean members to acquire the status of free dialogue partner FDP in Asean to get benefits from the Asean region
- New government in Islamabad needs to follow the previous government's moves to establish close relations with the countries of this region. There is need to undertake state visits to the countries in this region to refresh ties and carry out the talks and agreements which the previous government had initiated.
- Talks on free trade agreements were started by the previous government of Pakistan in 2005. These talks on FTAs should be

carried out to reach at these agreements as it will help to increase the level of trade and in and out flow of goods.

- Government of Pakistan also needs to ensure conducive environment to attract foreign investment. Because, worsened law and order situation is a major hurdle in the way of foreign direct investment. In this regard government should make foolproof security arrangements for the guest investors and trading parties.
- In order to achieve the good will of the countries of this region and give the message of our country being a responsible country for maintaining peace and security in the world Pakistan also needs to continue its war against terrorism at international as well as at local level. Particularly, it is necessary in the context of creating friendly environment for investment in the country.

Conclusion

Pakistan developed its vision East Asia policy in 2003 in search of bilateral and multilateral cooperation on the multidimensional front with the countries of Southeast Asia. Pakistan traditionally has been aligned with western countries for all types of interactions. Even after shift in world order after 1991 Pakistan remained stuck to its traditional policy of looking west rather than to look east. Consequently, Pakistan could not forge close relations with all the countries of Southeast Asia. Although, Pakistan enjoys good relations with some countries of this region like Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, etc. but they had lost warmth. However, experience of merely relying on west during 1990s and effects of 9/11 attacks exposed the vulnerabilities of Pakistan in the changed world where importance of various regions was gaining more currency. Thus, Pakistan also initiated its Vision East Policy to forge close and multidimensional relations with countries of this region. Moreover, the post 9/11 status of Pakistan in international community guided Pakistan's policy makers to search for new avenues to adjust in post

9/11 environment. Pakistan's policy makers were also driven in part by the economic potential of the countries of the southeast Asian region as well as by the successful story of the most vibrant organization of this region ASEAN. So, the geographic and strategic significance of Southeast Asia and its growing economic viability dragged Pakistan to cultivate much stronger and sustainable ties with the countries of this region. Against this context, Pakistan devised its Vision East Asia. The then prime minister of Pakistan Mr. Shaukat Aziz remarked during his visit to the countries of Southeast Asia in 2005 that a new dimension has been induced in Pakistan's foreign policy that intends to Look East in order to learn the experience of impressive economic development of the countries of this region. However, Pakistan is far behind than its traditional competitor India in its policy towards this region. Pakistan government needs to make concerted efforts to achieve its policy objectives in the due time.

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