LOST IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: INDIA'S "LOOK EAST" POLICY REVISITED

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Ever since its break-up with Soviet Union in the wake of the Cold War, India has embarked on a newly transformed relationship with the neighboring Southeast Asian region. The "Look East" policy, the backbone of India's foreign policy toward Southeast Asian nations which went into effect in 1992, is the indicator to gauge how far India has been engaged with its "extended neighborhood". Having been implemented for more than two decades, this policy has not yet resulted in a more frequent presence of India in the region, especially when it is compared to the other rising power in the region, China. While Indian leaders share the same view that Southeast Asia is of strategic importance, what has been done is below expectations. This study reveals that India's "Look East" policy's lack of success is based on three factors: domestic political issues, an unfavorable regional dynamic centered in China's active involvement in South Asia, and, to some degree, the US' "Pivot to Asia" policy.

India's influence in Southeast Asia can be traced back thousands of years. In G. V. C. Naidu's words, "no other country has influenced the region as much as India by way of religion, language, culture, and civilization... [proven by] enormous historical evidence to suggest that there were flourishing economic and cultural relations between India and the countries of Southeast Asia in the pre-colonial era."[1] The interactions between the two were significantly high, especially during the era of colonialism.[2] Having been struggling for independence from the British for centuries, India, under Jawaharal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi, was an ardent supporter of decolonization in Southeast Asia, encouraging self-reliant countries to emerge. Nehru was a close friend of Indonesia's Sukarno, a leader of a country besieged by

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1   G. V. C. Naidu, "Whither the Look East Policy: India and Southeast Asia," *Strategic Analysis* 28, no. 2 (April-June, 2004): 333.
2   Baladas Ghoshal, "India and the Struggle for Indonesian Independence," *Akdemika* 54 (Januari, 1999): 105-130.

centuries of Dutch colonialism. India was among the first nations to recognize Indonesian independence in 1945 amid its own struggle for self-determination. After gaining independence in August 1947, India did not cease to support the Indonesian people who were at that time fighting the returned Dutch.[3] In November 1947, Nehru brought before the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) a proposal concerning the worsening situation in Indonesia.[4] Later on, Delhi convened a Special Conference on Indonesia, inviting fifteen countries to support the action of pressuring the Security Council to take actions pertaining to Dutch re-colonialism.[5] Indonesia was the only country outside the British Commonwealth with which India held a joint naval exercise.[6]

During the Cold War era, India, along with several Southeast Asian countries, such as Indonesia and Myanmar, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, organized a Bandung Conference, created for the purpose of establishing the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in 1955. The primary goal of this "movement" was to stay neutral and not to lean toward either the United States (US) or the Soviet Union (USSR), among others.[7] In the 1960s, the relationship between India and Southeast Asia started to change when Nehru opted to cling to the USSR, raising questions of India's commitment to the nonaligned norm. Succeeding Nehru, Indira Gandhi's foreign policy did not significantly depart from that of her predecessor, including the support for decolonization in the Third World and a relationship with the USSR.[8] When Delhi got even closer to Moscow, culminating in the signing of the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in 1971, the gap with its neighbors in Southeast Asia widened. India became indifferent toward the Association of Southeast Asian

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3   In 1942 the Japanese drove out the Dutch from Indonesia, marking the beginning of three year-long Japanese occupation. After the Japanese surrendered to the Allied forces in 1945, Indonesian leaders made use of the power vacuum to declare its independence. The Dutch refused to recognize the independence and instead made a return to re-colonize Indonesia. Following intense pressure from India and Australia through the UNSC, the Dutch finally recognized Indonesian independence in 1949.

4   Ghoshal, "India and the Struggle for Indonesian Independence," 112.

5   The fifteen countries were Afghanistan, Australia, Burma, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), China, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iraq, Lebanon, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Saudia Arabia, Syria, and Yemen.

6   Naidu, "Whither the Look East Policy: India and Southeast Asia," 333.

7   The other goals, for instance, are the support of self-determination, national independence, and the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States, and rejection of the use or threat of use of force in international relations. See Ministry of External Affairs of the Government of India, "History and Evolution of Non-Aligned Movement," http://www.mea.gov.in/in-focus-article.htm?20349/History+and+Evolution+of+NonAligned+Movement (accessed August 20, 2014).

8   Sumit Ganguly and Manjeet S. Pardesi, "Explaining Sixty Years of India's Foreign Policy," *India Review* 8, no. 1 (January-March, 2009): 9.

Nations (ASEAN), accusing the organization of being the "West's Trojan horse."[9] Through the 1980s, the relationships between India and Southeast Asian states were marked by disquietude rooted in political disparities, jeopardizing their nascent economic cooperation.[10] The discordant relationship India had with ASEAN was exacerbated by Delhi's preference of backing Hanoi amid the organization's ostracism with respect to Vietnam's invasion to Cambodia in 1978. India's relationship with Vietnam rested on the shared history of war with China, notable the Indian border war in 1962 and the Vietnamese border war in 1979.[11] For India during the Cold War, "maintaining good relations with the Soviet Union and Vietnam was more important than its relation with ASEAN."[12]

The underdeveloped relationship between India and its Southeast Asian neighbors improved with the demise of the USSR in the early 1990s, thus forcing India to reexamine its foreign policy. The economic miracle of East Asia that largely captivated India, compelling Delhi to re-evaluate its inward-looking policy to a more Southeast Asia-centric one. Southeast Asia once again gained importance with regard to India's renewed foreign policy. The importance of Southeast Asia to India was perfectly depicted by the introduction of the "Look East" policy announced by former Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao in 1991. Rao introduced this policy to his Southeast Asian counterparts during his official visit to Singapore in 1992. In the same year, India received the status of ASEAN sectoral partner and a full dialogue partner in 1996. India's road seemed smooth when ASEAN conferred a membership upon India in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in July 1996, followed by India's accession to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) in 2003 as a precondition to take part in the East Asia Summit (EAS).

India is by nature seen by Southeast Asian nations as a benign rising power.[13] In contrast to China, India's foreign policy analyst, Francine R. Fran-

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9   Christophe Jaffrelot, "India's Look East Policy: An Asianist Strategy in Perspective," *India Review* 2, no. 2 (2003): 44.

10   Mohit Anand, "India-ASEAN Relations: Analysing Regional Implications," *Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies Special Report* 72 (2009): 1, http://www.ipcs.org/pdf_file/issue/SR72-Final.pdf (accessed March 31, 2013).

11   Pankaj Kumar Jha, "India's Defence Diplomacy in Southeast Asia," *Journal of Defence Studies* 5, no. 1 (January 2011): 57.

12   Tan Tai Yong and See Chak Mun, "The Evolution of India-ASEAN Relations," *India Review* 8, no. 1 (2009): 24.

13   Raul Mishra, "China in India's Southeast Asia Strategy," in *India-ASEAN Defence Relations, RSIS Monograph No. 28*, ed. Ajaya Kumar Das (Singapore: S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, 2013): 106, http://www.rsis.edu.sg/publications/monographs/Monograph28.pdf (accessed November 19, 2013).

kel, asserts that India appears "weaker and less threatening" that makes for an amiable partner for smaller Southeast Asian states to work with.[14] Eloquently articulated by former Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, the rise of India "does not generate the same fear as China."[15] Support for India's tighter relations with ASEAN come from those who anticipate China's growing weight in the balance of power mechanism in the region.[16] Besides, it is in ASEAN's interest to have "a number of major powers [including India]... [be] actively involved in the region."[17]

India's presence in Southeast Asia has been a source of comparison between Delhi and Beijing's ability to wield their influence in Southeast Asia. Compared to Beijing, Delhi is not as effective or efficient in engaging with Southeast Asian countries.[18] China's influence is strongly discernible while India's is barely felt. Even as the new decade rolls on and India moves steadily towards a closer and more robust relationship with Southeast Asia, China's prowess looms signifigantly larger than that of India. This then brings the question of why India seems to play it safe in the geopolitical contest taking place in the region with which India has had a strong bond since ancient times. This paper aims to show that the contradiction between India's great power ambition and the current reality is due to domestic constraints, regional containment, and the reliance on US military power are the reasons behind India's inactive approach towards Southeast Asian countries.

The "Look East" Policy: Where India Has "Lost"

India's "Look East" policy was designed as a framework for Delhi to reestablish its relationship with Southeast Asian states in the early 1990s, brought to life by then Prime Minister Rao. Although his decision to set about an engagement with Southeast Asia was commonly deemed as a means of economic liberalization, he thought of simultaneous politico-military cooperation aimed to win a strategic friend after the collapse of the USSR and to fend off China's domination in the region.[19] Indian scholar, Baladal Ghosal,

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14 Francine R Frankel, "The Breakout of China-India Strategic Rivalry in Asia and the Indian Ocean," *Journal of International Affairs* 64, no. 2 (Spring/Summer, 2011): 14.

15 C. Raja Mohan, and Alyssa Ayres, "Situating the Realignment," in *Power realignments in Asia: China, India and the United States*, ed. Alyssa Ayres and C. Raja Mohan. (New Delhi: SAGE Publications India, 2009): 313.

16 Ibid.

17 Evelyn Goh, "Great Powers and Hierarchical Order in Southeast Asia: Analyzing Regional Security Strategies," *International Security* 32, no. 3 (Winter, 2007/2008): 129.

18 Ibid., 151-152.

19 Ganguly and Pardesi, "Explaining Sixty Years," 14.

lays out three phases of the 'Look East' policy: 1992 to 2003 as the first phase, 2003 to 2010 as the second phase, and 2010 to present as the third phase.[20] The first phase was mainly economically-motivated, "so as to divert trade away from its main trading partners in North America and Europe."[21] India started to play a more active role in dialogue partnership, annual meetings, and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). The ARF can be seen as one of India's major achievements in the first phase of the 'Look East' policy. The ARF is crucial because it puts India on par with other powers, e.g. the US, Russia, China, Japan, Australia, and the European Union (EU), exhibiting India's growing prominence in the region.[22] Joining the ARF signaled India's shift from an opposition to a supporter of multilateral security frameworks.[23] Moreover, this phase veered India closer to ASEAN with respect to trade, industry and politics.[24] Unfortunately, according to Ghosal, the scant rise in trade did not meet expectations.[25]

The second phase began with India's accession to the TAC, leading to India's full membership of EAS in 2005. At this stage, India's presence began to grab China's attention. Beijing felt threatened in some way by India's involvement in the EAS, a forum where China could claim prominence vis-à-vis other non-ASEAN states. Before being admitted to EAS, India was invited to become a summit level partner by ASEAN in 2002. India and ASEAN then signed an ASEAN-Indian Partnership for Peace, Progress, and Shared Prosperity document in 2004.[26] The third phase witnesses India's increasing integration with Southeast Asia.

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20 Institute of Strategic and International Studies, "India's Look East Policy: From Economic Integration to Strategic Stakeholder in the Asia Pacific Region," *ISIS Focus* 9 (2012): 1-5, http://www.isis.org.my/files/ISIS_FOCUS_2012/IF9_2012/IF9_Index1.pdf (accessed March 21, 2013).

21 Zhao Hong, "India's Changing Relations with ASEAN in China's Perspective," *East Asian Institute (EAI) Background Brief*, No. 13 (December 7, 2006): 3.

22 Frankel, "The Breakout of China-India Strategic Rivalry in Asia and the Indian Ocean," 11. Evelyn Goh makes a good analysis on the hierarchy of power in Southeast Asia with the US on top as 'superpower overlay', China as 'regional great power', Japan and India as 'major regional powers'. Altough the distribution of power within ARF can be seen from this hierarchy, that ASEAN remains the Forum's driver, India to some extent enjoys equal status with others. See Goh, "Great Powers and Hierarchical Order in Southeast Asia: Analyzing Regional Security Strategies," 113-157.

23 Walter C. Ladwig III, "Delhi's Pacific Ambition: Naval Power, "Look East," and India's Emerging Influences in the Asia-Pacific," *Asian Security* 5 no. 2 (2009): 87-113.

24 Homeswar Kalita, "India's Look East Policy: Challenges and Opportunities Ahead," *Global* Journal of Human Social Science, Art & Humanities 12, no. 13 (2012): 32.

25 Institute of Strategic and International Studies, "India's Look East Policy: From Economic Integration to Strategic Stakeholder in the Asia Pacific Region," 2.

26 Hong, "India's Changing Relations with ASEAN in China's Perspective," 3.

There have been contentious arguments among scholars regarding the real objectives of the "Look East" policy. According to Naidu, there are three main goals of this policy that go in line with the three phases mentioned by Ghosal: "to institutionalize linkages with ASEAN and its affiliates; to strengthen the bilateral relationship with member states; and to carve a suitable place for India so that Southeast Asia will not fall within the influence of any major power, especially China."[27] In addition to that, India favors "rebuild[ing] frayed political relations… during the Cold War era,"[28] and making a "strategic policy of meeting the growing threat of China in the region."[29]

India's economic relations with ASEAN became more institutionalized following the commencement of the ASEAN-India Free Trade Agreement (AIFTA) on January 1, 2010 with the early participation of Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand. The remaining member states will follow suit after they cope with their respective domestic requirements as of December 31, 2016. In December 2012, ASEAN and India reached an agreement on an FTA on services and investment. However, ASEAN countries have never been among India's number one trading partners. The EU, West Asia (including the Gulf Cooperation Countries or GCC), Northeast Asia, and North America are the regions with which India extensively conducts its trade. The other side of the coin is that India is not ASEAN's first option to turn to either. China remains on top of the list followed by EU-27, Japan, and the United States. China contributes 12.9 percent of ASEAN total trade (value) in 2012, leaving India behind with 2.9 percent.[30] India's trade with ASEAN in the past year has been unsatisfactory to the point expected by both Delhi and its trading partners in Southeast Asia.

In the security field, India has made several significant contributions. India holds defense agreements with Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, Singapore, and Vietnam. India also initiated the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium in 2008 to display its willingness to take up multilateral actions by inviting Southeast Asian littoral states to participate, such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. The MILAN project, a naval gathering of the Indian Ocean's littoral states initiated by Indian Navy in 1995, is further proof of India's active engagement with Southeast Asian neighbors.

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27 Naidu, "Whither the Look East Policy," 332.

28 C. Raja Mohan, "India's Geopolitics and Southeast Asian Security," *Southeast Asian Affairs* (2008): 45.

29 Hong, "India's Changing Relations with ASEAN in China's Perspective," 8.

30 ASEAN, "ASEAN Community in Figures, ACIF 2011," http://www.asean.org/resources/publications/asean-publications/item/asean-community-in-figures-acif-2011-3 (accessed November 14, 2013).

In addition, "India had been participating in joint military exercises in non-combat activities, for example disaster response, peacekeeping, and other humanitarian actions within the framework of the ARF and ASEAN Defense Ministerial Meeting-Plus (ADMM+) activities."[31] These activities delineate India's intention to broaden its engagement with ASEAN in non-traditional security field.

Tracing the track record of India's relations with Southeast Asia since the 1990s, further engagement with ASEAN under the "Look East" policy is indispensable. Nonetheless, ASEAN's expectation to see a more active India in the Southeast Asian power contest falls short of realization. The South China Sea dispute can be used as an example. India has been trying to dis-entangle itself from related disputes regardless of the admitted importance of the area shared among Indian leaders. With the escalated tensions in the South China Sea expected to persist long into the future; India is regarded by some ASEAN states as the perfect candidate to counterbalance China's overwhelming predominance. Nevertheless, India demurs that intervention in the South China Sea is not an option.[32] It is understandable that India needs to avoid itself being dragged into a conflict with China in Southeast Asia, but this decision, to some degree, comes at a price of the region's perception whether India can be counted on. Bearing the title of emerging power, India's Southeast Asia policy is a source of comparison with that of China's. A respected Indian scholar, C. Raja Mohan, cogently argues that, "unlike China whose strategic community and government have shown great self-consciousness of their country's rise and articulated a clear set of regional goals, India has been relatively mute... [and] chosen to keep its head down."[33]

The trajectory for India's engagement with Southeast Asian states has been articulated in the "Look East" policy that officially got off the ground in 1991. Starting with strengthened economic cooperation culminating in the establishment of AIFTA, India reaches out to its neighbors by means of playing a greater role in politics and security field. These endeavors, none-

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31 Mely Caballero-Anthony, "ASEAN's Strategic Perspectives of India," in *India-ASEAN Defence Relations, RSIS Monograph 28*, ed. Ajaya Kumar Das (Singapore: S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, 2013): 34, http://www.rsis.edu.sg/publications/monographs/Monograph28.pdf (accessed November 19, 2013).

32 C. Raja Mohan, "An Uncertain Trumpet? India's Role in Southeast Asian Security," in *India-ASEAN Defence Relations, RSIS Monograph No. 28*, ed. Ajaya Kumar Das (Singapore: S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, 2013): 8, http://www.rsis.edu.sg/publications/monographs/Monograph28.pdf (accessed November 19, 2013).

33 Mohan, "An Uncertain Trumpet? India's Role in Southeast Asian Security," 15.

theless, do not suffice. The next part will assess India's half-hearted engagement with Southeast Asia.

Ignorance in Question: India's Passiveness in Southeast Asia

Since the inception of the "Look East" policy, India has not yet taken on the responsibilities that its Southeast Asian peers expected. China's aura still cloaks the region. ASEAN has been long expressing distaste of having one nation domineering over its peers. Driven by the shared commitment on which ASEAN is founded, regional leaders have aspired to keep the balance in their vicinity among great powers, without one triumphing over the other; hence, India is generally welcomed as a balance against China's ascendancy.[34] Former Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew reiterated that India's presence at the East Asian Summit (EAS) is of importance "because they did not want it to be dominated by China."[35] When India's bid for membership in the ARF was accepted, ASEAN nations reached an agreement that India's involvement was not negligible in balancing China. For Delhi, its "Look East" policy serves as a fundamental role in containing China's encirclement of India[36].

Many believe that India is supposed to do more in Southeast Asia to ensure the regional balance of power, yet Delhi appears to be inordinately cautious about getting a thorough engagement with the region off the ground.[37] India is relatively passive in conducting relations with neighboring states in Southeast Asia. There are at least three factors that steer India to the unprofitable corner of geopolitical contest in Southeast Asia. First, domestic issues that contribute to a troubled foreign policy-making process. Second, regional containment resulting from the volatile environment of South Asia and China's outreach strategy in the region. Third, the rapproachement be-

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34 Prashanth Parameswaran, "Strengthening ASEAN-India Relations in the 21st Century," *The Project 2049 Institute* (2010): 5, http://project2049.net/documents/strengthening_asean_india_relations_21st_century_parameswaran.pdf (accessed March 21, 2013).

35 Amitav Acharya, *Asia Rising: Who is Leading?* (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2008): 32.

36 China's geopolitical strategy does not end in Southeast Asia. It stretches to India's backyard. China's 'string of pearls' is ascribed as the encirclement strategy in which Beijing builds several ports in Bangladesh (Chittagong), Sri Lanka (Hambantota), and Pakistan (Gwadar); hence, encircling India. The 'Look East' policy aimed at abridging India with Southeast Asian states can serve as a tool for Delhi to cut the encirclement.

37 David Brewster, "India'sDefence Strategy and the India-ASEAN Relationship," in *India-ASEAN Defence Relations, RSIS Monograph 28*, ed. Ajaya Kumar Das (Singapore: S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, 2013): 135, http://www.rsis.edu.sg/publications/monographs/Monograph28.pdf (accessed November 19, 2013).

tween India and the US that provides for the former's reliance on the later's security umbrella in Southeast Asia.

The Effect of Underdeveloped Domestic Power Projection on Indian Foreign Policy

The making of foreign policy cannot be disentangled from domestic politics. In India the case is of no difference. It is argued that India's passiveness in Southeast Asia results from its foreign policy-making. Two things merit special attention: power projection and domestic constraints. Indian scholar, Khilani, says that India lacks "an instinct for power" which affects India's inability to follow through its aspiration to become great power to be reckoned with.[38] In the same vein, Indian Former Minister of External Affairs, Jaswant Shingh, propounds that "Indian political elites lack the ability to think strategically about foreign policy and defense issues."[39] Pratap Bhanu Mehta, an Indian foreign policy scholar, coined the term "cautious prudene" to delineate India's foreign policy thinking. By "cautious", he points out the nature of "India's sense of incapacity and unwillingness to use force... [and of recognition of] a limit in an ability to effect change elsewhere."[40] This "caution", however, does not negate India's "prudence" that power matters; thus it needs to be attained. Hence, there is an extant dualistic approach to India's foreign policy: an ambition of being a great power alloyed with a sense of reluctance to pursue such status. [41]

India is overwhelmed with domestic political matters.[42] Despite rapid economic growth in the past decades, India is still struggling with domestic socio-economic development problems. Inequality remains a problem in India where 60 percent of the population lives below the poverty line as of 2010. Internal security challenges emanated from the Naxalite or Maoist

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38 Quoted in Harsh V. Pant, "A Rising India's Search for a Foreign Policy," *Orbis* 53, no. 2 (2009): 255.

39 Ibid., 260.

40 Pratap Bhanu Mehta, "Still under Nehru's Shadow? The Absence of Foreign Policy Frameworks in India," *India Review* 8, no. 3 (2009): 230.

41 This lack of power projection does not mean that India does not have an ambition to become a great power. India has ingrained yearning for a right place in the global order: an equal footing with other great powers, namely the US, Europe, China, Russia, and Japan, known as the six-power constellation as drawn out by Nehru in the 1940s. See C. Raja Mohan, "Changing Global Order," in *Crux of Asia: China, India, and the Emerging Global Order*, eds. Ashley J. Tellis and Sean Mirski (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2013): 53, http://carnegieendowment.org/files/crux_of_asia.pdf (accessed October 25, 2014).

42 Poorvi Chitalkar and David M. Malone, "Democracy, Politics and India's Foreign Policy," *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 17, no. 1 (2011): 75-91.

insurgencies in the country. The never ending Kashmir crisis and Hindu-Muslim spats sum up the list of India's domestic flaws. The overbearing of domestic and socio-economic issues are seemingly more important for Indian politicians to be successful than foreign policy.[43] Compounding the quandary of India's lack of consciousness pertaining to foreign policy, the decision-making process in this realm is individualistic. India's leaders' agenda features a less foreign policy-oriented program, let alone one with a long-term strategy. Instead, a day-to-day thinking dominates their most attention.[44] Such day-to-day thinking is preoccupied with domestic problems.

The nature of India's domestic politics contributes also to volatile foreign policy-making. The political field is highly fragmented where coalitions compete with one another. The decision-making of domestic and foreign policy is a long, tedious, and circuitous process. India's parliamentary system dictates that foreign policy-making rest upon the party or parties in power, or the incumbent, and the opposition parties.[45] This process is a struggle of interests among top-level bureaucrats, such as the prime minister and the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), confounded by the political parties as well as media and public opinion.[46] The implication is that India's foreign policy is less tied by an international dimension than that of internal dynamics.

India's political system allows multifarious political parties, representing a wide array of social groups, to balance against each other in the pursuit of their own interests. The overlapping and crisscrossing interests boil down to considerable difficulty in reaching a unanimous voice on a single issue of foreign affairs. Imagining the number of issues spanning from economic to security concerns with which India has to cope, combined with a complicated bureaucracy, it is not realistic to expect India to be more responsive to the relentless change in international affairs-related issues. India's political fragmentation contributes to undermining the ability of the state to give an effective response to security threats in a quick pace not only in the domestic but also regional and international domains.[47]

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43 Manjari Chatterjee Miller, "India's Feeble Foreign Policy: A Would-be Great Power Resists Its Own Rise," *Foreign Affairs* May/June (2013): 14-19.

44 Ibid.

45 Sukhwant S. Bindra, "Domestic Milieu of India and Foreign Policy Making Process: A Theoretical Perspective," *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 65, no. 2 (April-June, 2004): 253.

46 Nitya Singh, "How to Tame your Dragon: An Evaluation of India's Foreign Policy toward China," *India Review* 11, no. 3 (2012): 140.

47 Rohan Mukherjee and David M. Malone, "Indian Foreign Policy and Contemporary Security Challenges," *International Affairs* 87, no. 1 (2011): 87-104.

This troubled foreign policy-making has a negative implication on the "Look East" policy. The "Look East" policy is said to be India's grand design of an outward-looking foreign policy, something India had never done even during the Cold War. It was crafted under the spirit of economic and foreign policy reform.[48] Therefore, it can be argued that despite the 'lack of power projection' among Indian leaders, some, like Rao and Vajpayee, are able to contrive a foreign policy that brings India closer to fulfilling its great power ambition. However, one problem endures. A South Asian expert, Rajpal Budania, summarizes that India's problem does not lay in its incapacity to devise "intellectual debates on policy choices but [in its] lack of effort to develop the capability to implement policy."[49] The problem of implementation springs from India's domestic constraints. It sometimes results in a delayed or even cancelled strategic decision.[50] One example is illustrative of this. Prior to the signing of ASEAN-India FTA in 2009, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had a difficult time assuring the cabinet that the FTA was not just about economics, but also politics. It is a similar reason that causes India to approach relatively slowly to multilateral cooperation, not to mention cooperation with ASEAN. A dualism stands out: on one hand India is cognizant of the needs to increase its participation in the multilateral domain, while on the other hand its domestic constituents hold it back.[51] On one hand India is intent on making the most of the "Look East Policy", on the other hand it has to confront domestic hurdles to live up to its aim.

India's Regional Containment

India is surrounded by unstable neighbors that consistently threaten both regional as well as India's own stability. Nepal's Maoist rebellion is accused of having a connection with the Nexalite of India. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) insurgency causes domestic insecurity in Sri Lanka. The bleak future of Afghanistan following US withdrawal will certainly shake the stability of the already unstable South Asia. The endless conflict of India and Pakistan also adds to the inexorably complicated region India has to attend to. Additionally, the threat of terrorism primarily targeting India continues to increase. There is, however, an increasing shared belief among a coterie of

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48 James Manor, "India's Reform Strengths," in *Asia's Giants: Comparing China and India*, ed. Edward Friedman and Bruce Gilley (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005): 109.

49 Rajpal Budania, "Domestic Constraints in India's Defence Policy-Making," *Strategic Analysis* 26, no. 3 (2002): 390.

50 Ibid.

51 Chitalkar and Malone, "Democracy, Politics and India's Foreign Policy," 83.

Indian leaders and scholars that a stable and secure region is chief to India's own economic growth.[52] In order for regional cooperation to succeed, bilateral relations have to be fortified beforehand.[53] Instead, in South Asia the opposite happens. Even though bilateralism is more assuring and alluring through which India's predilection of security can be furthered, this one-on-one relationship with the neighbors has its own downside. India's treatment is largely ill perceived by its neighbors, thanks to the touch-and-go approach utilized by Delhi to exhaust cooperation only when there is something on which to cooperate.

Moving for a while from the perturbing neighborhood policy of India, it is true that the unreliable and unfeasible South Asia compels India to move beyond its region as clearly stated on the 'extended neighborhood' strategy.[54] It is also true that India has been trying to loosen up its grip on South Asia, for the sake of better engagement with the more promising yet auspicious Southeast Asia.[55] The story changes when China starts to "look south".

Both China and India have the same ambition to advance their influence beyond borders. In this contest, China is one step ahead of India. While India's "Look East" policy moves sluggishly, China expands its area of interest to cover South Asia. The all-weather China-Pakistan relationship has long been alarming the leaders in Delhi. China has deployed more troops to the disputed boundary in Arunachal Pradesh leading to a skirmish with India in 2008 and been reported to encroach into Indian territory. China has transformed Tibet into a militarized zone through structural military development and infrastructure building (e.g. direct railway from Beijing to Lasha in 2008). China has also conducted several military exercises in Tibet such as in 2012. China's "string of pearls" project resonates an unpleasant memo to Delhi that Beijing has encircled India by way of building ports around

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52 Ashok K. Behuria, Smruti S. Pattanaik, and Arvind Gupta, "Does India Have a Neighbourhood Policy?" *Strategic Analysis* 36, no. 2 (2012): 229-246.

53 Partha S. Ghosh, "An Enigma that is South Asia: India versus the Region," *Asia-Pacific Review* 20, no. 1 (2013): 106.

54 The term 'extended neighborhood' is part of India's foreign policy strategy firstly introduced and pushed under the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led administration of Atal Bihari Vajpayee (1998-2004). The core of this strategy is that India's concerns lie beyond South Asia which includes other neighbors and countries adjoining South Asia—the so-called 'extended neighborhood'. This thought is believed to be relevant still as India's foreign policy-making handbook. For comprehensive analysis on this policy, see David Scott, "India's 'Extended Neighborhood' Concept: Power Projection for a Rising Power," *India Review* 8, no. 2 (2009): 107-143 and Ashley J. Tellis, "US and Indian Interests in India's Extended Neighbourhood," in *Power realignments in Asia: China, India and the United States*, ed. Alyssa Ayres and C. Raja Mohan (New Delhi: SAGE Publications India, 2009).

55 Robert Hathaway, "India Transformed: Parsing India's "New" Foreign Policy," *India Review* 2, no. 4 (2003): 3-4.

South Asia that includes Gwadar in Pakistan, Chittagong in Bangladesh, and Hambantota in Sri Lanka.

China's "charm" approach towards South Asian states dissuades the latter to keep India away. Varun Sahni puts it bluntly, "filling the abyss left by India's incapacity to present a feasible regional vision and to invest heavily in it, China has worked in a systemic and piecemeal manner to create an alternative for India's neighboring countries."[56] Using economic cooperation as a cover-up, China's policy in South Asia teems with strategic interests. An Indian foreign policy analyst, Vikram Sood, identifies China's tactics to rein India in the subcontinent by means of "keep[ing] the borders with India tranquil but not solving the [border] dispute", while at the same time "trade[ing] with India but arm Pakistan and wean away Nepal, Bangladesh, and Myanmar."[57] On the same page, a defense analyst, Iskander Rehman, argues that "China's strategy is to divert India's attention from East Asia and to head it off reaching out beyond South Asia, by keeping it focused on the western front and by using Pakistan as a form of "proxy deterrent" against India in its backyard".[58] To upset India even more while strengthening its footing in the region, China bids for representation in the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), a moribund regional organization that includes Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. All member states, excluding India, unsurprisingly support China's entry into the regional organization.[59]

China's presence in the Indian Ocean cannot be disentangled from the rapid modernization of naval capability aimed to protect China's interests in securing the Sea Lanes of Communications (SLOCs) and to check India's power.[60] In "retaliation", Indian navy was dispatched to the South China Sea for the same reason as China's Indian Ocean agenda.[61] India, intent to

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56 Varun Sahni, "India's Foreign Policy: Key Drivers," *South African Journal of International Affairs* 14, no. 2 (2007): 25.

57 Vikram Sood, "India and Regional Security Interests," in *Power realignments in Asia: China, India and the United States*, ed. Alyssa Ayres and C. Raja Mohan (New Delhi: SAGE Publications India, 2009): 261.

58 Iskander Rehman, "Keeping the Dragon at Bay: India's Counter-containment of China in Asia," *Asian Security* 5, no. 2 (2009): 118.

59 Amardeep Athwal, *China-India Relations: Contemporary Dynamics* (Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2008): 46.

60 Niclas D. Weimar, "Sino-Indian Power Preponderance in Maritime Asia: A (Re-)Source of Conflict in the Indian Ocean and South China Sea," *Global Change, Peace & Security* 25, no. 1 (2013): 17-19.

61 India's first naval dispatch to South China Sea was in 2000 under a joint exercise with Vietnam. Singapore is another Southeast Asian states with which India has conducted the same joint naval exercise. However, these are not rotational. In contrast to India, China's naval acitivities in the South China Sea is far extensive. Instead, China has expanded its maritime interest right beyond the South China Sea. China has a blue-water ambition aimed at breaking away its first- and second-island

keep China at arm's length, is a proponent of Iranian-based mega project of Chahbahar port and an eager actor poised to make use Kazakhstan's air base and Mongolian space-monitoring.[62] Even so, it is not an equal contest when one side toddles, the other runs.

India is facing a furtive two-pronged containment in its own region by its neighbors and China. Whereas the former is, to some extent, the unsolicited result of Delhi's homespun ambiguous foreign policy towards the neighbors, the latter gives credit to India's indecisiveness to follow through its passion to become a great power worthy of attention. Either way, both are lethal to the well-being of India as a "destined" great power.

That India being hemmed in its home region of South Asia affects the way the "Look East" policy is carried out. Despite the leaders' longing for breaking away the sluggish development of their immediate neighborhood, they are conscious that the region needs it as the model of vibrant democracy and economic development. Added to their strand of thinking is China's rapid engagement with India's neighbors. The feeling of being the natural leader of South Asia bears the leaders in Delhi a responsibility to secure their backyard from any interlopers. There is no doubt that China appears on their radar. This has a consequence on India-made 'Look East' policy whose main goal is engaging Southeast Asian states: that India cannot give its all attention to its extended neighbors by ignoring the neighbors next door.

The Effect of India's Reliance on the US Security Umbrella

China's strategy to contain India, by expelling Delhi from Southeast Asia and stepping in South Asia, seems to be the reason that India has been rather reluctant to engage with ASEAN countries despite the language and intent of its "Look East" policy. When China moves to India's own milieu, the likely option for Delhi is securing its own backyard. One factor related to China that underpins India's decision to play less aggressively in Southeast Asia is the protracted security umbrella of the US featured by the 'pivot to Asia' policy. Being a democratic friend of the US, India enjoys assurance that whatever disservice Beijing does Washington will react. A secured Southeast Asia, es-

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chains. Indian Ocean falls within the domain in which Chinese Navy or the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) can operate beyond its home waters. In 2008 China successfully deployed its navy to Indian Ocean in the mission to secure the SLOCs threatened by Somalia pirates. It was the first PLAN's overseas operation. China's incessant naval build-up is concomitant with realizing its blue-water agenda.

62 Harsh V. Pant, "Rising China in India's Vicinity: A Rivalry Takes Shape in Asia," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* (2013): 9, doi: 10.1080/09557571.2012.734781 (accessed April 11, 2013).

pecially the South China Sea, remains the US pivotal priority in Asia. Knowing this, India seems to believe that there is no urgent need to pour all attention to Southeast Asia while concurrently impeding a conflict with China that may convolute the already distrustful relations between the two.

Counting the US factor in India's Southeast Asian policy can lead to misconception. India began to matter in the eyes of Washington after the successful conduct of nuclear test in 1998.[63] The test was held during the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) administration under Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. India at that juncture did not face any security threat that might justify the development of nuclear weapons. The government, however, alleged China's threat as the main catalyst for the test.[64] The decision was apparently well crafted by Vajpayee's government to attract US attention, even though it was highly risky.[65] India-US relations thrive further following the commitment to strategic partnership carved out in 2005. Nonetheless, the relationship between India and the United States is not flawless. Whereas it seems that India-US rapprochement is entering a new phase that draws both democracies closer, starting with the 1998 nuclear test when Clinton started to notice India's capability as a rising power, the level of trust between the two has never been that high. Regardless the status of strategic partners pinned on each self, several discrepancies of point of view prevail. Delhi's project to diversify its energy sources by cooperating with Iran vexes Washington.[66] India's long pretension of a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has been objected by the US.

Despite the fact that Indian leaders have carefully reiterated that Delhi seeks no alliance with the US, India welcomes US overarching naval prowess to roam the Indian Ocean for the sake of keeping the stability and security of the region intact. On the other hand, China, being unduly sensitive to the US containment strategy of which it fell victim, does not want to lose grip on any possibilities. India is well aware, according to Mohan, that "Beijing's real concerns might have less to do with what India does in Southeast Asia than

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63 James Chiriyankandath, "Realigning India: Indian Foreign Policy after the Cold War," *The Round Table: the Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* 97, no. 374 (2004): 206.

64 David M., Malone and Rohan Mukherjee, "India-US Relations: The Shock of the New," *International Journal* 64, no. 4 (Autumn, 2009): 1069.

65 Hathaway, "India Transformed: Parsing India's "New" Foreign Policy," 4-5.

66 Aside from economic cooperation, India and Iran share similar concerns in other fields, such as geopolitics concerning the stability of Afghanistan and security, through military modernization and training. Harsh V. Pant, *Contemporary Debates in Indian Foreign and Security Policy: India Negotiates Its Rise in the International System* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008): 113-129.

the prospects of Delhi joining Washington in an alliance to contain China."[67] From Delhi's perspective, playing it safe is preferable to sailing against the tide of the power contest involving China and the US. India can minimize the risk of frontal conflict with China both in its respective backyard, South Asia, and Southeast Asia with regard to its 'Look East' policy. However, at the same time it costs India's desire to draw on the hailed 'Look East' policy devised to advocate its interests beyond South Asia.

Conclusion: India's Re- "Look East" Policy

The US Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton once boldly encouraged India to "not just look east, but to engage east and act east as well."[68] She was right, but the follow-up was below expectation. India, a rising giant with great power aspirations, has failed to fulfil what the world expected to see.[69] India understands the importance of Southeast Asia as a gate to Northeast Asia and the Pacific, but its actions to influence it have been limited. India is by nature located in South Asia, a region full of domestic clashes within its states and is prone to instability. India has never been content with the slow pace of South Asian regional development. That India borders troublesome neighbors justifies the dissatisfaction frustrating Indian leaders to alter their focus to the "extended neighborhood". The idea is well founded but not sufficiently adopted. India has been identified as a capable and emerging power endowed with an ambition to become a global power, but it is rarely takes an active role. India still lacks experience in how best to come to grips with foreign countries. Unlike its "rival" China, India's foreign policy has never been expansive. In some way, India poses no threats to others. In another way, it signals a dubious intention of what Delhi genuinely hopes for by playing behind the scene. The concoction of problematic links between domestic politics and foreign policy-making, a nearly failed home region of South Asia and the pressures originated from Sino-India rivalry emasculates India's performance to project its "great power" dream. India must not play safe for good. Realizing the daunting threat emanating from China's more frequent presence in South Asia, the Vajpayee administration had begun accelerating

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67 Mohan, "India's Geopolitics and Southeast Asian Security," 53.
68 Quoted in Sumit Ganguly and Manjeet S. Pardesi, "Can China and India Rise Peacefully?," *Orbis* 56, no. 3 (2012): 482.
69 The US is one of the proponent of India's playing greater role in Southeast Asia. See Brewster, "India's Defense Strategy and the India-ASEAN Relationship," 136.

Rao's "Look East" policy since 1998 onwards. The record, notwithstanding, does not look convincing.

In 2012 Vietnam granted an Indian oil company, Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) Videsh Limited, an oil exploration rights in the areas near the disputed Paracel Islands. When China sent out a signal to India to reconsider the contract, the later appeared staunch. Later on, India took takes the defense cooperation with Vietnam to a new level. India has agreed to train 500 Vietnamese submarine operators and to transfer four naval boats under a $100-million credit line.[70] Furthermore, Indian Navy Chief Admiral D.K. Joshi states that India is prepared to send naval ships into the South China Sea in order to protect its interests in the area.[71] Prime Minister Singh's official visit to Japan and Thailand in 2013 might set the tone for re-activating the "Look East" policy, but the region craves more. Delhi is in dire need to revise its "Look East" policy by adding 'active and thorough engagement' as the key to a successful implementation of its foreign policy towards Southeast Asia.

When Narenda Modi was elected a new prime minister in May 2014, India's foreign policy was hoped to change course to include something the previous leaders were reluctant to pursue. The depiction is rather bleak. In the new government's foreign policy statement Southeast Asia is not mentioned. Myanmar was the only representative from Southeast Asia invited for consultation with the new Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj in June.[72] Modi seems more interested in embracing his adjacent neighbors of South Asia under the umbrella of SAARC, alongside his national-security-comes-first rhetoric. There are still some straws in the wind, nonetheless. Modi's recent move to improve India's relations with Japan cannot be dissociated from his strategy to keep Delhi's grip in the region alive, albeit limited. India is also likely to continue with its defense program with Vietnam around

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70 Sandeep Dikshit, "Vietnam Offers India Seven Oil Blocks in South China Sea," *The Hindu*, November 21, 2013, http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/vietnam-offers-india-seven-oil-blocks-in-south-china-sea/article5372744.ece (accessed February 20, 2014).

71 Zachary Keck, "India's South China Sea Gambit," *The Diplomat*, December 5, 2012, http://the-diplomat.com/2012/12/indias-south-china-sea-gambit/ (accessed February 18, 2014). This view is incompatible with what the Indian government has been retained that India will stay out of the South China Sea dispute. Mohan asserts that there is discordant stance between Indian military and government. The later prefers not to agitate China by interfering in the territorial and maritime disputes that pit Beijing against four Southeast Asian states (Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam). See Mohan, "India-ASEAN Defence Relations," 30.

72 Nayan Chandra, "S-E Asia Stil Important to India's Development and Security," *The Strait Times*, June 26, 2014, http://www.straitstimes.com/news/opinion/eye-the-world/story/s-e-asia-still-important-indias-development-and-security-20140626 (accessed September 18, 2014).

military training. But again, these are not sufficient. What is left for India to do, Mohan says, is to "demonstrate its policy commitment and expanded capabilities for power projection beyond India's shores."[73] It cannot simply jettison the idea of refurbishing the relations with Southeast Asian states as a gateway to reach out to the great power aspiration. Otherwise, India will always be a second-rate power under the shadow of China's preponderance sway in Southeast Asia and, possibly, in other regions where their power ambitions overlap.

The two-decade old "Look East" policy is still relevant to serving India's desire to act parallel to its growing power. The foundered domestic economy in the late 1980s was brought back to life once the reform set off, of which an outward-looking policy was the main ingredient. That heretofore India's 'Look East' policy has not yet reached its zenith, the three factors laid out earlier are still likely play their detrimental roles. To overcome these hindrances, India needs to reconsider its policies. First, India should continue to engage Southeast Asia although such action is not large. India might not be able to match China's economic package or to offer a security umbrella as the US does to Southeast Asian states. India has simply not arrived at that point yet. What India can do hitherto is provide assurance that, regardless of the size or intensity of its own "package", it will stay in the region. Continuity is what matters, for it is better to be around than aloof. Second, India needs to balance its priorities: the one in the domestic and regional domain with the one beyond that. India can still champion regional leadership in South Asia while simultaneously wining the hearts and minds of its neighbors in Southeast Asia. Delhi can also be a bridge between South and Southeast Asia. The relationship between the two region sis modicum at best. If India could draft cooperation between these abutting regions, not only will it receive accolade from the neighbors but also an upgraded power status. Third, India already has the guideline named the 'Look East' policy. It is ripe for being harnessed. What is left to do is to ensure its implementation. This, however, is no easy task given India's half-hearted commitment to reach out to its "extended neighborhood". Its leaders however, should not forget that great power with global reach does not stay at home. **Y**

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73 Frankel, "The Breakout of China-India," 7.