



India's Defence Cooperation with South East Asian Countries: Need for Proactive and Substantive Action

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Elements of Defence Cooperation

Looking at the evolving global strategic dynamics it is quite apparent that Indo-Pacific region has emerged as an area where there are not only many fast growing economies but also it is riddled with maximum number of hot spots of conflict. While the US is being perceived as a power that is becoming more isolationist and somewhat on the path of losing its pre-eminent position in world affairs, China because of its military and economic heft has increasingly become hegemonic. China has been on the path of disturbing and challenging the status quo in East China Sea, South China Sea and along the borders of India. Many of China's initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative, realizing the 'Chinese Dream' and forging a 'new type of major power relations' have created apprehensions among the global and regional powers as to whether China's rise is any more peaceful. As Asia Pacific transforms to Indo-Pacific and as India emerges to become an alternative to hegemonic and coercive China, it becomes imperative to build robust and lucrative relations with countries of ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) in South East (SE) Asia.

India has been engaging the ASEAN countries both multilaterally and at the bilateral levels. India's Look East policy which commenced in 1992 with New Delhi becoming a dialogue partner of the ASEAN has undergone several up-gradations and now it is a strategic partner of the grouping. In 2014, India transformed its Look East to Act East Policy thus signaling that India was going to impart meaningful substance to its engagement with the ASEAN. Further, while the leitmotif of India's Look East Policy in the initial years was economic engagement and to improve connectivity in a number of areas, over the years it has acquired a strategic orientation. Besides the political and economic engagement, defence and security cooperation has become an important element of dialogue with almost all the SE Asian nations. As outlined by the Minister of State for External Affairs, Gen. VK Singh in December 2015, "*The Objective of 'Act East Policy' is to promote economic cooperation, cultural ties and develop strategic relationship with countries in the Asia-Pacific region through continuous engagement at bilateral, regional and multilateral levels*".¹ Thus, building strategic relationships with SE Asian countries has been one of the new areas of thrust under the Act East Policy. Also ASEAN-India Plan of Action for the period 2016-20 that was adopted in August 2015 had

identified advancing mutual cooperation and working on new initiatives in political-security, economic and socio-cultural arenas.

The ASEAN countries have also seen a rise of threats and challenges both in traditional and non-traditional areas of security and have been evolving responses to address the same. They have been pursuing multi-vector foreign and security policies in order to mitigate the adverse effects of an unstable and complex security environment in the region. Most countries of SE Asia are under the dominating economic influence of China. While countries like Cambodia and Laos have fallen into the Chinese camp, there are others like the Philippines, Thailand and Singapore who deftly balance their alliance partnership with the US with skillful handling of relations with China. However, unity amongst the ASEAN members continues to be negatively impacted by China's coercive policies.

Even the concept of Indo-Pacific as articulated by Prime Minister Modi in Shangri La Dialogue in June 2018, which is still evolving, would drive strength by cooperating with ASEAN and emphasizing its centrality.² India's vision of Indo-Pacific puts ASEAN at the heart of its engagement within the new construct that runs from the shores of Pacific Ocean to the East African coast. In a way India's policy objectives of furthering its political and security cooperation with ASEAN countries have been expanded in scope to cover the entire Indo-Pacific region. The free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific connotes a variety of meanings to the major and smaller powers operating in the region. Though it is not directed against any country, yet adherence to rule based order could point towards China that is viewed as having not accepted the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) judgment of July 2016 which went against Beijing, as also because of its assertive policies in South China Sea and elsewhere. PM Modi had observed that rules and norms were to be based on "the consent of all, not on the power of the few" whereas China's militarization activities in the South China Sea could be seen as flouting of international arms. In the complex and uncertain strategic situation the ASEAN countries are more likely follow an approach that does not compel them to side with either the Chinese or the US Camp and the concept of 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' enables them to exercise such a choice. In short, ASEAN members and some of the other major powers' strategic objectives would be to work towards preventing a single hegemonic power dominating the region.³

On the other hand, while the concept of 'Quad' of powers could be linked with India's Act East Policy, yet the ASEAN countries are wary of Quad or Quad-plus idea because not only this would be viewed as diluting the centrality of ASEAN but also the Quad is seen as a strategic grouping designed to constrain/contain China. However, Quad still remains a loose grouping with divergent views on their respective approaches to it. Nevertheless, the evolving bilateral and trilateral strategic relationships, notably the defence and security cooperative aspects between India, the US, Japan and Australia, as also with individual SE Asian countries, would contribute positively to peace, security and stability in the ASEAN region.

Further, it has also been argued that presence of multiple players in the region would have the effect of providing some degree of balance to China's growing influence and assertive policies. Thus, India with its policy objectives of strengthening defence and security cooperative relationships with ASEAN countries as part of its larger engagement effort could further build up its image as a benign balancer in the region. It also needs to be noted that for a variety of reasons most of the ASEAN members are well disposed towards strengthening a cooperative and mutually beneficial defence and security relationship with India.

In January 2018, Indian-ASEAN Commemorative Summit was held at New Delhi after 25 years of engagement. Besides economics and connectivity, 'political and security cooperation' was the most important agenda outlined in the Joint Statement after the Summit. Both sides expressed their resolve *'to work closely together on common regional and international security issues of mutual concern and ensure an open, transparent, inclusive and rules-based regional architecture'*.⁴ In addition, all the ASEAN leaders wanted India to play a more assertive role in the strategically important Indo-Pacific while recognizing New Delhi's growing stature in ensuring regional peace and stability.⁵

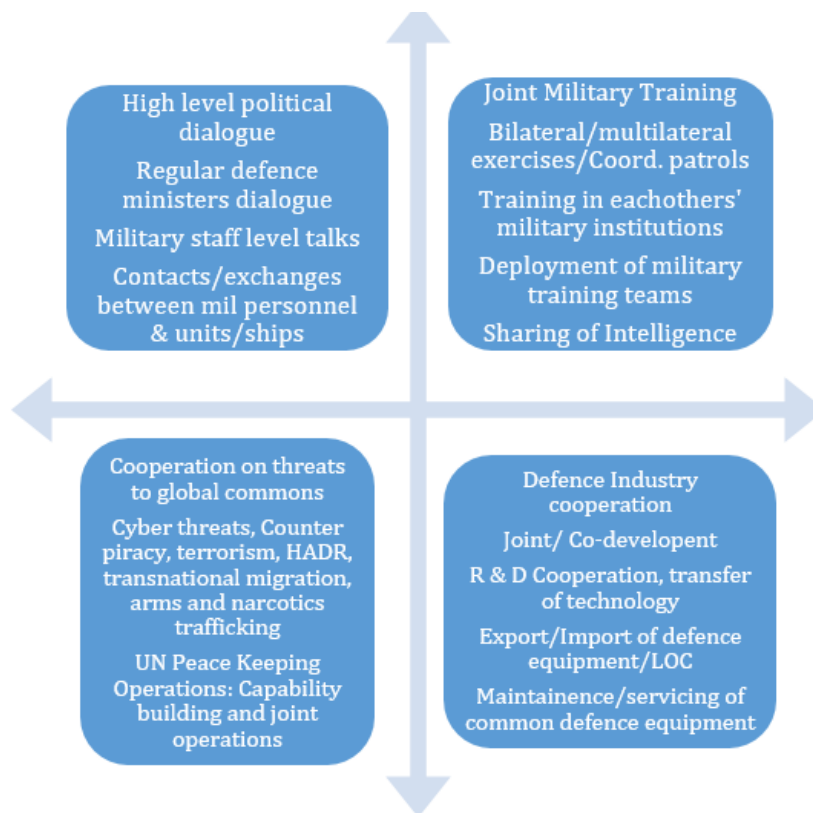


Figure 1: Elements of Defence Cooperation

The figure given above lists out very broadly the elements of defence cooperation.

Over the last two decades India has also been expanding and working on its bilateral defence relationship with almost all the SE Asians to a greater or lesser degree. With the above as the background it is critical to examine the contours of India's defence and security cooperative framework with the ASEAN countries and whether goals and objectives set out for our defence diplomacy have been achieved in a satisfactory manner. What are the shared strategic and security interests that propel our evolving defence relationship with the SE Asian nations? How do the SE Asian nations view India as a partner in strategic and security arenas? And how can we further strengthen the cooperative efforts?

The ten ASEAN/SE Asian countries have varying degrees of geo-strategic and geo-economic significance given their location, size and capabilities. It is also evident that there could be differing perceptions between India and the ASEAN countries on some of the strategic and security issues. This paper will discuss the evolving bilateral defence relations with the ASEAN members in both bilateral and multilateral settings and make some policy recommendations.

Myanmar: India's Gateway to the ASEAN

India has a land border of 1643 km with Myanmar. Myanmar also has a coast line of 1930 km along the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal. Myanmar is the gateway geographically as well as historically to India's linkages with South East Asian countries, especially so to the mainland ASEAN nations. Being a vital link in India's sub-regional and connectivity initiatives like the Trilateral Highway and the Mekong-India Economic Corridor (part of Mekong Ganga Cooperation Initiative)⁶, among others that enhance connectivity between India and ASEAN countries, its strategic significance cannot be overemphasized.

Myanmar, besides being the second largest of India's neighbours and the largest on the eastern flank, it has a long border with China in the north contiguous with the disputed Sino-Indian border which has many strategic and security implications. Cutting off the North-East Indian insurgents' infiltration/escape routes to Myanmar is a priority and it has to be complemented by co-operation to choke the flow of arms to the India insurgent groups via the sea also. China's strategic military relationship with Myanmar and its quest for an access to the Indian Ocean is another compelling factor for India to improve its defence and security co-operation with Myanmar.

On the other hand, Myanmar's both civil and military elites do not feel very comfortable with China's expanding economic and military influence in Myanmar. In many bilateral forums their think tank experts have articulated that Myanmar would not like to become another 'province of China'. China's support of the Ethnic Armed Organizations led by United Wa State Army has also created complications for the ongoing peace process. According to one Myanmar Think Tank's analytical

report, China Myanmar Economic Corridor (a part of the Belt and Road Initiative) might aggravate underlying conflicts, peace and security issues or even create new problems.⁷ Further, in the initial years of Aung San Suu Kyi government the US and the Western countries had increased their economic and military engagement with Myanmar, however, in the aftermath of Rohingya crisis and conflict the US and the West have moved away from Myanmar allowing China to stage a comeback. Therefore, Myanmar is very keen to expand its economic and military engagement with India.

Reverting to the bilateral security aspects, the long land border which has witnessed gun running, narcotics trafficking, smuggling in contraband and cross border raids by insurgent groups for achieving their nefarious objectives against the State also remains an area of prime concern for India. In recent years, insurgents of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khapalng, or NSCN (K) have carried out a number of attacks against Indian security forces from their bases in Sagaing Division of Myanmar across the border. They have also been giving shelter to a number of other anti-India insurgent outfits that function under 'CorCom', an umbrella group of anti-Indian insurgents with bases in Manipur and Myanmar. In 2015 and 2016 such groups have carried out ambushes against security forces resulting into a number of casualties.

It is heartening to know that in end January 2019 Myanmar army captured NSCN (K) HQ in Taga region of Sagaing region.⁸ Further, in a joint and coordinated operation lasting from 17 February to 02 March 2019, India's Assam Rifles on its own side of Mizoram border and Tatmadaw (Army) on Myanmar side of border destroyed about a dozen camps of Arakan Army which had been increasingly threatening peace in Rakhine State and Paletwa region of Chin State.⁹ In fact, they were posing threat to the Kaladan multi-modal project of India that would link the transit point from Paletwa to Zorinpui on Mizoram border by road.



Figure 2: Multimodal Kaladan Project

Thus a robust defence and security cooperative framework with Myanmar becomes an imperative. Therefore, India has been pursuing enhanced defence relationship with Myanmar as a component of its erstwhile Look East and now Act East Policy. Even while the military government was in power in Myanmar in 1990's India pursued a policy of having a constructive dialogue with Myanmar on political, military and security issues. Earlier, India had extended military co-operation and financial help to Myanmar even during the days of Jawaharlal Nehru and Prime Minister U Nu immediately after the independence of Myanmar, when communist insurgency threatened to bring down the government.

However, military relations between the two nations took-off since the goodwill visit of the then Chief of Army Staff, General BC Joshi to Myanmar (May 1994). India has supplied artillery guns, howitzers, T-55 tanks and two BN-2 Defender Islander maritime surveillance aircraft and deck-based air-defense guns to the Myanmar Navy. India has undertaken maintenance of Russian equipment held by them. Bharat Electronics has also provided Hull Mounted Sonars to the Myanmar Navy and other type of surveillance radars for their Navy.¹⁰ Provision of Acoustic Domes and torpedoes to the Myanmar Navy is also in the pipeline.¹¹

In addition to supply of defence equipment and regular exchange of visits by the military leaders of both sides the joint training exercises have also been a regular feature of the bilateral defence cooperation. For instance, in November-December, 2017 a contingent of Myanmar Army took part in counter insurgency training and both sides exchanged their experiences of combatting insurgencies including related precepts and concepts.¹² During their stay of four weeks from 25 November to 24 December 2017, the Myanmar Army Contingent was given extensive and tailor-made training on various Counter Insurgency aspects with special emphasis on Insurgency in North East India and Myanmar. In addition, for the first time an India-Myanmar bilateral Army exercise 2017 (IMBAX – 2017) was held in Meghalaya in November 2017 which was aimed at training the Myanmar personnel for United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKO).¹³ The second such exercise was conducted in January 2019 at Western Command, Chandimandir, with similar aims and objectives.

While joint and coordinated patrolling along the land borders by the armies has been in vogue for long the Navies of two countries have conducted coordinated patrols along the maritime boundary since 2013. Last such exercise was undertaken along the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) in the Andaman Sea in September 2018 with the closing ceremony conducted at Coco Islands.¹⁴ Myanmar Navy is also a regular participant of 'Milan' series of joint naval exercises that takes care of concerns on poaching, anti-piracy, armed robbery, maritime terrorism and coastal security. The security component of the Act East Policy is best represented by the two multilateral initiatives in the form of 'Milan' biennial naval exercises and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) wherein Myanmar is an active participant.

Balancing of Chinese influence off the Myanmar seaboard is an imperative though this will continue to be a contested zone in the long term as China is unlikely to give a free run to others in what it sees as a critical national interest impacting its energy security. However, what needs to be kept in mind is that China exercises considerable influence in Myanmar despite Aung San Suu Kyi led government being in power. As mentioned earlier, China has linkages with powerful ethnic armed groups and organizations like United Wa State Army and other such groups and uses them as leverages to control the narrative and interfere in the peace process in Myanmar. Similarly, the oil and gas pipelines linking Yunnan to the Arakan Coast provide China with access to Bay of Bengal and development of ports in Kyaukphyu and Sittwe helps resolve China's Malacca dilemma to an extent.

Malacca Straits' Countries

For India, relations with South East Asian countries mainly Myanmar, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam have a direct bearing on a counter-poise vis-a-vis China. Thus India's Act East Policy is welcomed in the region including the defense and security dimension as well. Within this rubric, relations with Thailand on the Bay of Bengal littoral, and Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia that straddle the Malacca Straits have strategic significance not only because of by virtue of their location but also because of their growing economies and their respective statures in trade and commerce.

Further, Malacca Straits is the pivotal transiting point through which over 55 per cent of India's trade passes.¹⁵ China's growing naval presence in the Indian Ocean by using Malacca Straits is another factor which is worrisome for India. There are threats and challenges of piracy and smuggling on the high seas that impacts the smooth flow of trade and commerce thus propelling the countries to secure the sea lanes. Therefore, defence and security cooperation between India and these countries has acquired increased salience over the years.

Thailand

Besides being part of ASEAN, Thailand is also a member of Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and shares maritime boundary with India. Internally, Thai military has been dominating the political scene since May 2014 when military Junta headed by Gen Prayuth Chan-o-Cha took over reins of power. This has propelled the US to distance itself from Thailand to a degree and China getting closer to the military junta. China has exported some tanks and other military equipment to Thai defence forces. However, the Thai military continues to take part in America's and Thai sponsored Cobra Gold joint military exercises which is the largest annual exercise in the Asia Pacific with over 27 nations taking part.¹⁶ India and China also take part in

the non-traditional/civic part of the exercises like in Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief (HADR) and allied aspects.

At the economic level, it is an export led economy, with exports accounting for more than two-thirds of its gross domestic product (GDP). However, its GDP growth has been stagnant around 3.6 percent yet, its GDP was around 475 billion USD in first quarter of 2019 and is projected to cross 510 billion USD thus making it one of the largest economies in South East Asia.

Country	2018 Population (millions)	2018 GDP (Billion USD)	2018 GDP Per Capita (USD)
India	1,334.22	2689.992	2,016.15
Myanmar	52.83	71.543	1,354.16
Thailand	69.18	490.12	7,084.47
Singapore	5.66	241.434	64,567.00
Indonesia	265.31	1005.268	3,788.95
Malaysia	32.44	314.71	10,703.61
Vietnam	94.57	347.29	2552.83
Philippines	107.01	331.678	3,099.26
Cambodia	16.253	24.141	1,485.33
Laos	6.777	18.23	2,690.19
Brunei	0.434	14.695	33,824.10

Figure 3: GDP and Population: India and Southeast Asia Comparison (Compiled from IMF: World Economic Outlook)

Thailand's security concerns are shaped by challenges of terrorism and insurgency in its Southern areas, territorial disputes and security threats from Cambodia and Myanmar as also narcotics and trafficking of arms from across its land borders as well as in maritime domain. It also faces many other non-traditional threats like natural disasters. Earlier, during the Cold War it had strengthened its military relationship with the US because of likely threat from China and other communist countries in the region. While Thailand still maintains good mil to mil relationship with the US yet there appears to be some weakening of such ties. India and Thailand share common perceptions of security environment in Bay of Bengal and thus there is scope for further growth of military-to-military relationship especially in areas of counter terrorism, counter radicalization, maritime domain awareness, cyber security and such other allied aspects. Towards this cooperation between the two countries based on the Joint Working Group on Security was established in 2003 which was later upgraded to include defence exchanges. The first meeting of India-Thailand Defence Dialogue was held in New Delhi in December 2011 and a bilateral MoU on defence cooperation was signed in January 2012.¹⁷

The then Vice President Ahmed Ansari had visited Thailand in February 2016 with the main focus strengthening defence relationship with particular reference to maritime security. Vice President had observed that *"Our resolve to strengthen our bilateral engagement in the areas of security and defense will help the region as a whole and promote greater regional economic integration and connectivity"*. The visit had come after Indian Navy Chief had visited Thailand in July 2015 that expanded the area of cooperation of between two navies to include hydrography, maritime domain awareness and increasing the scope of coordinated patrols. It also needs to be noted that Thailand Navy has been a regular participant in India led 'Milan' series of joint naval exercises held biennially in Bay of Bengal. It is not only in the maritime domain that bilateral exercises have taken place but also between the armies of both the countries. For instance, in July 2017 the annual joint exercise 'Maitree 2017' took place between Indian and Thai armies in Himachal Pradesh basically revolving around the theme of counter terrorism.¹⁸ The next iteration of exercise i.e. 'Maitree 2018' was held in Thailand in August 2018.

The current defence cooperation comprises regular joint exercises, coordinated maritime patrols near the international maritime boundary to counter terrorism, piracy and smuggling, training of officers at each other's armed forces training institutions and participation as observers in military exercises. Some of the cooperative efforts, for instance in the area of counter-terrorism also complement the regional efforts as declared in ASEAN-India Joint Declaration for cooperation in combatting international terrorism. During Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha's visit to New Delhi in July 2018, expanding maritime cooperation, working for joint defence production and coordinating counter-terrorism strategy were emphasized upon.¹⁹ This was further supplemented by India's Defence

Minister Nirmala Sithraman's visit to Bangkok in August 2018 with the objective of stepping up military-to-military engagement. In fact, during the visit Thailand confirmed Royal Thailand Army's participation in the inaugural BIMSTEC Army exercise as also conclave of Chiefs in India in September 2018.²⁰

However, the level and scope of bilateral exercises needs to be up-scaled and possibly brought at the same level as what Indian armed forces carry out with other South East Asian countries like Singapore or Vietnam. Considerable scope exists for expanding defence cooperation with Thailand.

Singapore

Singapore has been a traditional supporter of India in intensifying its engagement with the ASEAN. Within the ASEAN it is one of the major driving force for building up the grouping. Singapore's economy revolves mainly around trading and offering of financial services as it has little by way of manufacturing or natural resources. Thus it is a strong supporter of regional stability and securing sea lines of communications (SLOC) that in turn would enable it to pursue its trading and financial services. While it strives to maintain a balanced relationship with all the powers in the region it is perceived as more of an ally of the US especially so by China. As part of Obama's erstwhile 'Rebalance to Asia' or 'Pivot to Asia' policy the US Navy Littoral Combat Ships (LCS) have been visiting and operating from Singapore. On the other hand, Singapore does have a low key bilateral defence agreement with China of February 2008. However, what needs to be noted is that when China offered to provide Sanya in Hainan for field exercises and live firing practices, Singapore refused the offer. Singapore also maintains a good political and defence relationship with Taiwan despite political pressure from China.

With the above as political and strategic context, Singapore has endeavored to forge a strong economic and defence relationship with India. It has a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement with India as well as a Strategic Partnership. Over the years especially in the aftermath of Cold War both nations have forged cooperation in maritime security, training forces, joint naval exercises, collaboration in defence technologies and military exchange programmes. Further, India has provided access to Singapore armed forces to use Indian training facilities like Air Force and Artillery firing ranges. Singapore has signed the Defence Cooperative Agreement in 2003 and a Bilateral Agreement for the Conduct of Joint Military Training and Exercises in India. Naval exercises between both the navies are being conducted annually since 1994. Such naval exercise between both the navies at times have also been conducted in South China Sea while the shore phase of some of these exercise has been conducted at the Changi Naval Base of Singapore.

During Defence Minister Antony's visit to Singapore in June 2013, India and Singapore signed a fresh agreement to extend the use of training and exercise facilities in India by the Singapore Army for a further period of five years. A bilateral agreement for utilization of facilities in India by the Singapore Air Force and Army was signed in October 2007 and August 2008 respectively. Singapore is the only country to which India is offering such facilities. In 2016 as part of enhancing strategic relationship the areas of cooperation were expanded further to include security and intelligence cooperation besides cooperation in multilateral forums. However, the high point of defence relationship was reached in November 2017 when the ongoing their maritime security cooperation was enhanced to allow access to each other's bases. The naval cooperation agreement signed between the two sides' Defence Ministers aimed at bolstering maritime security, joint exercises, "temporary deployments from each other's naval facilities" and mutual logistics support.²¹ Both sides, besides deepening cooperation in the maritime security domain, also called for ensuring freedom of navigation in critical sea lanes which becomes relevant because of the Chinese assertive manoeuvres in the Indo-Pacific region. Needless to say that such arrangements would contribute to enhancing Indian Navy's operational envelop especially across Malacca straits which rhymes very well with imparting substance to India's Act East Policy besides enabling Indian military to deepen its defence ties with the other South East Asian countries.

Dr. Ng, Singapore's Defence Minister was in favour of more Indian naval ships coming to its shores for securing sea lanes of communication. He also stated that *"Singapore is very supportive of India's vital security of the Indo-Pacific region, and we share common security interests geographically - that is, the Strait of Malacca and the Andaman Sea, which is really a continuous body of water that is a critical Sea Lines of Communication."*²² The existing agreement on use of India's artillery, mechanized infantry and Air Force ranges was also renewed for another five years after its end in 2018. Further, both sides have signed agreement (known as 'Implementing Arrangement between the Navies of both countries Concerning Mutual Coordination, Logistics and Services Support') between their navies for mutual coordination, logistics and services support for naval ships', submarines and naval aircraft including ship borne aircrafts.

In November 2017, India and Singapore agreed to facilitate greater collaboration in aerospace, electronics and other areas of mutual interest between the defence industries of both countries. Earlier, in 2006 an India-Singapore Defence Technology Steering Committee was set up for undertaking joint research projects. India has offered of its test ranges and associated infrastructure for the conduct of testing and evaluation for such R&D projects. Some progress in defence industry cooperation, with the establishment the Defence Industry Working Group (DIWG) in August 2017.²³

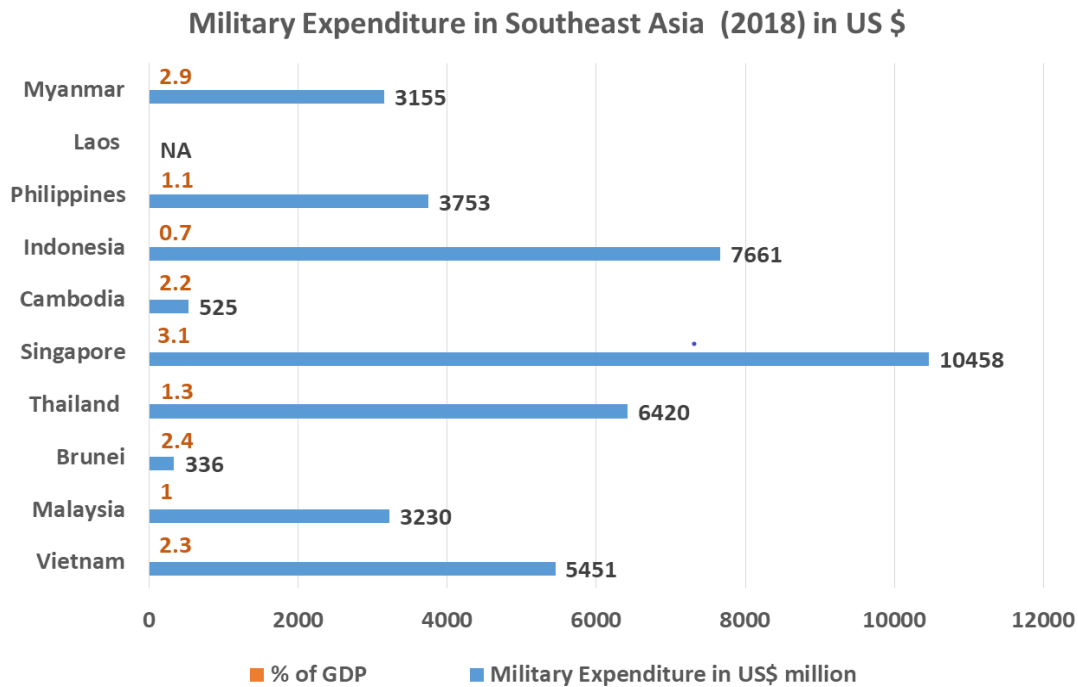


Figure 4 (Source SIPRI Year Book)

It also needs to be noted that while Singapore might be a small nation, it has a private firms that have modern technologies for production of some of the defence systems like artillery systems. Singapore headquartered firms like ST Engineering and its subsidiaries have developed adequate capabilities in Land Fighting Systems. In fact, it is an integrated engineering group providing solutions and services in the aerospace, electronics, land systems and marine sectors. However, because of the corruption charges the Firm remains blacklisted in India. Such an arrangement can only be fully exploited only when the ban imposed on ST Kinetics of Singapore is removed. Though the blacklisting norms were eased in November 2016, it is not clear whether it applies to ST Kinetics. Nevertheless, there is a considerable opportunity for India's defence industrial complex for co-production and development of defence systems. The graph below depicts military expenditure of SE Asian countries, it would be interesting to note that Singapore's expenditure is the highest.

Indonesia: India's Maritime Neighbour

Among the ten ASEAN not only Indonesia has the highest population (258.7 million) it has the largest economy in Southeast Asia. It is also one of the emerging markets economies of the world with GDP per capita estimated in 2018 of USD 3,970 which is much more than India's GDP per capita estimate for the same year of 2,190 USD.²⁴ Indonesia is also the largest trade partner of India in the

ASEAN grouping and the only member of G20 grouping amongst the South East Asian countries. Besides the economic prowess, its geostrategic location enables it to dominate the straits that link the Pacific and the Indian Ocean. Indonesia straddles Malacca Straits and provides access to the South China Sea and beyond to the Pacific through its Lombok, Sundae and Ombai Straits. These are significant choke points along the sea lines of communications and each of these straits has its unique strategic significance. Indonesia also is the only ASEAN country which has put forth its concept of the Indo-Pacific, which is being debated by ASEAN.²⁵ Further, Indonesia is a maritime neighbour of India with the closest distance between the two being around 90 nautical miles from Great Nicobar Island of India.

With its attributes, Indonesia is viewed as a significant member and a natural leader of the ASEAN grouping. Jakarta also hosts the secretariat of the ASEAN where India has posted an Ambassador to the ASEAN. Needless to underline the fact that Indonesia has a very significant role to play in the evolving strategic dynamics and the emerging security architecture in the region.

Indonesia's security concerns are shaped by its archipelagic nature of its territory that comprises 17,500 islands with an area of nearly 2 million square kilometers. With a coastline of over 54,000 kilometers Indonesian security forces have to protect against a wide variety of security threats. Indonesia also sits astride the sea lines of communications that link the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Safeguarding littoral approaches, defending territorial integrity and sovereignty indeed is a mammoth task for the Indonesian armed forces (Tentara Nasional Indonesia, or TNI).²⁶ Indonesia has also to deal with the internal challenges of insurgency, religious extremism and terrorism. In addition non-traditional maritime security challenges like piracy, protecting the maritime exclusive zone and providing humanitarian assistance and disaster relief are some of the areas where TNI is looking to further build their capabilities. Added to this are the challenges of cyber security. These security threats and challenges were underlined by Indonesia's Minister of Defence at the Shangri La Dialogue of June 2019.²⁷ Further, Jakarta also remains concerned with China's 'nine dash line' in the South China Sea that overlaps Indonesia's EEZ around Natuna Island, Indonesia is reluctant to precipitate the issue. However, to protect its claims over Natuna and EEZ it has established a military base in Natuna.

Moreover, Indonesian armed forces are also lagging behind in its modernization efforts as compared to other defence forces in the region. Therefore, development of indigenous defence industry and import of defence systems and equipment is a priority for Indonesia but subject to availability of funds. India and Indonesia therefore, face many common challenges in defence and security arena and could benefit from mutual synergies by strengthening defence and security cooperation. With the visit of President Indonesian President Joko Widodo to India in December 2017 the bilateral relationship was elevated to Comprehensive Strategic Partnership from the existing level of Strategic Partnership of

2005. This move implied adding substance and expansion of the existing political and security relationship wherein defence cooperation would be a significant component.

Defence engagement with Indonesia can be said to have begun 1950's and continued till early 1960s when 1800 Indonesian Air Force personnel were trained in India. Thereafter, the tempo of engagement slowed down particularly due to the negative impact of Indo-Pak wars of 1965 and 1971 that led to distancing of the political and security relationship. It was only in the aftermath of removal of President Suharto from the power that a revival of Indonesian ties with India, in some measure, took place.

Based on the Agreement on Defence Cooperation of 2001 both sides have been conducting joint India-Indonesia Coordinated Patrol along the maritime boundary involving ships and maritime aircraft of the two navies since 2002 on a regular basis. Such a patrol is conducted twice a year and is instrumental in enhancing the inter-operability between the two navies. With the establishment of bilateral Strategic Partnership in 2005 the defence engagement also gained some momentum. Besides the naval and maritime cooperation, the Army and Air Force also expanded their bilateral engagement. In March 2012 the first in series of joint Army exercises codenamed Exercise 'Garuda Shakti' was conducted in Counter Insurgency and Jungle Warfare School (CIJWS) in Mizoram. The sixth edition of joint military exercises Garuda Shakti included Special Forces operations at Bandung during February 2018. Both sides shared their best practices and experience in counter-terrorism operations, close quarter battle and skills and drills for Special Forces operations.

Earlier in December 2016, during President Joko Widodo visit to India both sides decided to reinvigorate the Defence Ministers' Dialogue and the Joint Defence Cooperation Committee (JDCC) Meetings to review and upgrade the existing "Agreement on Cooperative Activities in the Fields of Defence" to a substantive bilateral Defence Cooperation Agreement. The institutional dialogue between the Army and Navies of both the sides are being held regularly. For instance, Staff Talks between the Armies were held in August 2016 and the Navies in June 2015, the first Air Force Staff Talks have also been held recently. In addition, the Defence Ministers level dialogue has also been tasked to work out collaboration between defence industries for joint production of equipment with technology transfer, technical assistance, and capacity building cooperation. The two sides have also been cooperating in HADR operations besides many other areas of non-traditional security threats and challenges. The Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism has also been meeting regularly to discuss cooperation in this area as both sides have been afflicted with the scourge of terrorism.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Jakarta in end May 2018 wherein robust defence cooperation was one of the most significant aspect of the summit. A fresh Defence Cooperative Agreement was signed during the visit. The bilateral defence and security cooperation mechanisms have included holding of First Security Dialogue, the Second Biennial Defence Minister Dialogue in

January 2018 and Fifth JDCC in 2017 which points towards growing intensification of defence engagement. Further, a Joint Task Force to undertake projects for port related infrastructure in and around Sabang deep sea port in Indonesia is being set up.²⁸ Sabang is a strategically important sea port on the mouth of Malacca Straits. The collaboration between both sides in the area of defence industry has also made some progress with PT Pindad of Indonesia and Tata Motors signing an agreement for supply of Tata trucks for the Indonesian military.

Further, both sides also came out with a “*Shared Vision of India-Indonesia Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific*”²⁹ building upon the joint maritime cooperation statement signed in December 2016. Maritime cooperation between both nations has been an enduring feature of the ongoing growth of strategic relationship. There is a mutual recognition of the fact that both sides share similar perceptions on ensuring maritime security and safety of the SLOCs. Both sides also adhere to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), freedom of navigation and over-flight on the high seas and unimpeded commerce and resolution of maritime disputes through peaceful means. The vision revolves around strengthening cooperation in maritime safety and security, and promotion of maritime industries. It needs to be noted that the maritime boundary between both sides is yet to be delimited. However, both sides have agreed that delimitation should be based on the principles of international law including the 1982 UNCLOS. The issue is expected to be resolved through Technical Meetings and expeditious negotiations.

The shared maritime vision recognizes the strategic importance of Indonesia as a ‘fulcrum that connects the Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean’ and thus its significance for global maritime trade and commerce. Indonesia has also contributed in a significant way as a member of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) especially as its Chair in 2017. It is also a member of IONS. India, on its part, has supported the concept and practice of ASEAN Centrality and unity. In fact, there is a resonance between India’s Act East Policy and ‘Security and Growth for all in the Region’, or SAGAR, and Indonesian Ocean Policy and Indonesia’s Global Maritime Fulcrum Vision.³⁰

The Indonesian armed forces (TNI), because of historical legacy, continue to have some influence in the affairs of the State. Their modernization began in 2008 and the TNI has a 15 year programme of development of their capabilities. Therefore, there are many areas of defence industry where they can be mutual collaboration to exploit their respective strengths for improving their capabilities. For instance, Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL), a Defence Public Sector Undertaking, is planning to open such offices in other SE Asian countries including Indonesia.³¹ Electronics from the BEL are being used in diverse fields of defence like radars, missiles, communications and C4ISR (Command, Control, Command, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance) systems. Thus it makes sense for both India and Indonesia to strengthen their defence cooperative framework.

Malaysia: Guarding the Malacca Straits

Malaysia also lies astride the Malacca Straits; it has a peninsular portion and rest of its territory (East Malaysia) is spread across the South China Sea in Sarawak and Sabah in Borneo Island. Besides the strategic location of Malaysia its rising economic salience makes it an important player in the regional dynamics. It's GDP per capita for 2018 is USD 11,340 thus making it the third richest country in the ASEAN after Singapore and Brunei.³² According to recent IMF Report Malaysia is poised to join the High Income group of countries. However, with a population of 32 million the size of its economy is about one third of Indonesian economy even while it is 35th largest economy in the world. There is also a considerable presence of Indian diaspora which has acquired a degree of political base in Malaysia. At times some anti-national Indian elements have been known to use Malaysia as a base for their undesirable activities against India.

Like any other South East Asian country China is an important factor in Malaysia's geopolitical, economic and security outlook. While bilateral trade with China was 96 billion USD in 2017, it is expected to cross 100 billion USD³³ and it is one of the few countries in the world that has trade surplus with China. Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammed has been critical of China's projects and has shelved two projects of China's Belt and Road Initiative.³⁴ However, largely Malaysia's criticism of China's policies in South China Sea has also been muted because of economic benefits likely to be gained from Beijing. Further, both the countries have upgraded their relations to a comprehensive strategic partnership in 2014.

Malaysia and Pakistan are both members of Organization of Islamic countries and the Commonwealth of Nations and have been pursuing a degree of defence cooperation with each other. For this purpose they had set up a Joint Committee on Defense Cooperation (JCDC), in 1997. They have a MOU on defence cooperation signed in August 2016 when Pakistan Army Chief visited Malaysia for enhancing the relationship. In February 2018 Malaysia's Naval Chief had visited Pakistan to strengthen military-to- military relations. However, the mutual defence ties are very limited even while Pakistan is keen to expand the relationship.

Malaysia has also witnessed increased activity by radical Islamists that have linkages with similarly inclined groups in Indonesia and Philippines. In recent years, members belonging to Jemaah Islamiya, Moro Islamic Liberation Front and Dar-ul-Islam have been apprehended in Malaysia. There have also been reports of over 100 Malaysians having joined ISIS. Around 300 Malaysian have been arrested by the police over last four years for links with the ISIS. Therefore, counter-terrorism, counter-radicalization and bilateral cooperation is one of the important objectives to be achieved by both India and Malaysia.

Further, Malaysia's maritime security concerns also get impacted due to the nature of its geography as it is divided between peninsular Malaysia and provinces of Sarawak and Sabah that lie across the straits. This is further compounded by China's expansive claims in South China Sea which overlap those of Malaysia's. In fact in March 2019, Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed had asked China to define its claims of ownership of Islands in South China Sea.³⁵ In his address at Shangri La dialogue in June 2019 Defence Minister of Malaysia, Mohamad Sabu described that "*Disturbances in the South China Sea, the movement of Rohingyas in the region and non-traditional security threats such as maritime and cyber security risks pose the biggest challenges to the region*".³⁶ Besides underlining the need to build on collaborative defence diplomacy to deal with these challenges, the Defence Minister also emphasized that the 1982 UNCLOS should be upheld. In most of the areas mentioned above both Malaysia and India have common perceptions regarding security issues and thus have common grounds to cooperate in defence and security issues.

For India strengthening of defence relationship with Malaysia is necessitated not only because of the need for realizing the objectives of its Act East Policy but also by New Delhi's motivation in securing its growth and development through promoting a peaceful and stable environment in the region in particular and at the global level in general. Malaysia is seen as a key member of the ASEAN and a very significant enabler and contributor to the regional security. Malaysia is also a strategic partner of India and a priority country for India's Act East Policy. Indo-Malaysian defence and security cooperation is, thus, a subset of a larger bilateral and regional engagement.

Defence cooperation between India-Malaysia has been on an upward trajectory since the signing of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Defence Cooperation (MIDCOM) in 1993. However, going back into history Indian and Malaysian defence forces have a shared heritage as both nations' armed forces have evolved from the British armed forces. During the British colonial era, the Madras native Infantry troops served in Singapore, Malacca and Penang in the 19th century. British Indian Army consisting of Indian troops and formations also contested the Japanese offensive in Malaya and Singapore in World War II. Some of the officers of federation of Malay states were trained in the Indian Military Academy, Dehradun. A number of such officers had risen to very high positions in the political, civil and military spheres. In 2007, Captain Tunku Ismail Ibrahim, the grandson of the Sultan of Johor state, led a unit of the Indian Army at the Republic Day in New Delhi in 2007.

There have been regular mutual visits by the Army, Air Force and Naval Chiefs from both sides. Besides regular dialogues between the senior military officials, it was decided during PM Modi's visit to Malaysia in July 2018 that the annual India-Malaysia Defence Cooperation Meeting will be held at the defence secretary level.³⁷ It also needs to be noted that the Indian Air Force Team deployed in Malaysia trained Malaysian pilots on the Su-30 MKM aircraft for two-and-a-half years from February 2008 onwards. Further, during the visit of Malaysian Prime Minister in April 2017 Royal

Malaysian Air Force (RMAF) and Indian Air Force (IAF) have agreed for the setting up of an Aircraft Safety and Maintenance Forum for cooperation in training, maintenance, technical support and safety-related issues especially, in relation to SU 30MKM. Additionally, both armies have been carrying out joint military exercises named 'Harimau Shakti'; the last one was carried out in May 2018 in forests of Malaysia.³⁸ The exercise was aimed at sharing the best practices and procedures of both the armies in conducting counterinsurgency operations in a jungle terrain.

Malaysia has also been looking for training its Scorpene submarine crew and maintenance of the submarines. These are the areas where both sides can cooperate as India has acquired such submarines and is also now making them in Mazagaon dockyards. Further, in order to enhance mutual defence ties both sides have planned to conduct joint naval exercises. In any case, Malaysian Navy has been participating in multilateral 'Milan' series of joint naval exercises since 1997, the latest participation being in March 2018.³⁹ Also Director General of India's Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) visited Malaysia in February 2017 after the operationalization of mechanism for sharing information including for HADR and white shipping.



Figure 5: Map of The Malacca Strait

India has also been supportive of Malaysia's proposal of compulsory pilotage through the Malacca Straits and discussions on the issue have taken place during the Shangri La Dialogue. India has also been keen to participate in the Malacca Straits Patrol (MSP) and 'Eyes in the Sky' programme where Malaysia is one of the members of the multilateral group (Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand). However, due to concerns about sovereignty of littoral states and possibilities of other

countries (like China for instance) asking for membership have been instrumental in imposing caution on the group to allow India to gain membership. Largely, Indonesia is viewed as leader of the MSP. In early May 2018 during an experts' meeting between Indonesia and India a discussion on the topic took place but India's efforts in convincing Indonesia on the desirability of India becoming a member being a 'funnel' country of Malacca Straits were not successful.⁴⁰ There is some understanding on part of India that the other three members of the group are favorably inclined to consider India's proposal. Nevertheless, India has been participating in the Cooperative Mechanism on the Strait of Malacca and Singapore (SOMS) and has contributed to projects on removal of wrecks and improvement of trafficability and for enhancement of navigational safety and environmental protection in the Straits.

Undoubtedly, there is a need for progressing from bilateral army exercises to joint manoeuvres by respective navies and air forces. While intentions to move forward on collaboration in defence industry have been announced in a number of joint statements, there is nothing much that has been done on the ground. There are many possible areas of collaboration in ship building as also for aircraft maintenance. Bharat Dynamics Limited and Bharat Electronics Limited have several items in their inventory like radars and communication equipment where collaborative approaches could be adopted. For the first time, India took part in Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace Exhibition (LIMA-19) held in March 2019.⁴¹ It is a maritime and aerospace exhibition that takes place once every two years in Langkawi, Malaysia. Indian Air Force participated with two of its indigenously developed LCA fighter aircrafts to showcase its capabilities to the Royal Malaysian Air Force. In addition Indian Navy's frontline corvette INS Kadmatt also participated in LIMA-19.

Vietnam: Key Pillar of India's Act East Policy

Defence relationship with Vietnam has been of the most robust among India's evolving defence cooperation with the other South East Asian countries. Such a relationship is bolstered by shared strategic and security perceptions of the rapidly changing global and regional order. Vietnam economy has been on an upward path since its economic reforms of 1986 (Doi Moi i.e. economic renovation). On the other hand, Vietnam's bilateral trade with China has crossed 100 billion USD to reach a figure of 106 billion USD in 2018⁴² whereas bilateral trade with India is projected to be 15 billion USD by 2020. Communist Party to Party relationship between both countries is said to be on an even keel despite major differences and an element of strategic distrust on the question of sovereignty issues in the South China Sea. However, China-Vietnam war of 1979 and China's expansive claims and irredentist and assertive tendencies, especially in the case of the South China Sea continue to impact Hanoi's approach to Beijing.

Over the years, India's politico-strategic equation with Vietnam has been strengthening and the defence and security cooperation has been gaining momentum. Indian military not only admires

Vietnamese forces victories over the French at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, the Americans in 1975 and thwarting of the Chinese military in 1979 but also has several military lessons to learn from execution of such campaigns by the Vietnamese armed forces. Unquestionably, Vietnamese army is an experienced and battle worthy institution with which India could benefit in many ways through collaboration.

India-Vietnam defence and security cooperation was given a formal shape through signing of an agreement in 2000 when the then Defence Minister of India George Fernandez visited Vietnam. It was further enhanced in July 2007 when a Strategic Partnership agreement was signed that contained an outline on how to further institutionalize and expand the defence and security cooperation. The agreement also provided a framework for civil nuclear cooperation, counter terrorism cooperation, enhancing regional security besides addressing the challenges of transnational crimes and drug trafficking. Since the taking of reins of power by PM Narendra Modi's administration in May 2014 the political, security and economic engagement with Vietnam has gained further momentum.

During the visit of PM Nguyen Tan Dung to India in October 2014, PM Modi had remarked that *"Our defence cooperation with Vietnam is among our most important ones. India remains committed to the modernization of Vietnam's defence and security forces. This will include expansion of our training programme, which is already very substantial, joint-exercises and cooperation in defence equipment."*⁴³ Earlier in August 2014, President Pranab Mukherjee had visited Vietnam and signed with Vietnamese counterpart Truong Tan Sang a number of agreements covering political, defence and security cooperation, economic cooperation, science and technology, culture and people-to-people links, technical cooperation and some others. There has been a general understanding amongst the leaderships of the both sides that defence and security cooperation remains an important pillar of the strategic partnership between the two countries.

However, it was in May 2015, that the Defence Ministers of the two countries signed a *"Joint Vision Statement on Defence Cooperation for the period 2015-2020"*, which was in a way first of its kind of vision that also reflected growing defence and strategic ties.⁴⁴ A MoU between Vietnam and the Indian Coast Guard Forces on coordinating crime prevention efforts and the development of transnational cooperation was also signed. The five-year Joint Vision statement provided further impetus to India-Vietnam's expanding defence and strategic ties. India has been working to assist Vietnam in defence industry, military technology, intelligence, personnel training, cybercrimes and cyber security.

It is well recognized that India has moved forward with the capacity building of the Vietnamese Armed Forces particularly the Navy. Military training, repairs and maintenance support, exchanges between think tanks, study tour and ship visits have been the areas of focus. Providing assistance to Vietnam's navy through training to operate the new Russian-built submarines is an ongoing process.

Vietnamese sailors have been undergoing training capsule in submarine warfare at the Navy's submarine school INS Satavahanain, Visakhapatnam, since October 2013. Indian naval ships have been regularly making port calls in Vietnam and showing their flag to indicate the right of passage and freedom of navigation in the international waters. In so far as Indian Air Force is concerned, there are also plans to provide training for Vietnamese Air Force pilots for flying Sukhoi fighters. Capacity building of Vietnam Armed Forces for improving the security environment is one of the major goals to be achieved.

Building of a credible defence industrial complex is an important objective to be achieved by Vietnam. And India could be of much help in this regard especially in areas where it has acquired niche capabilities.

Up-gradation of Indo-Vietnam relationship to that of 'Comprehensive Strategic Partnership' in September 2016 included a major emphasis on strengthening defence and security cooperation.⁴⁵ India also extended a 500 million USD defence line of credit the biggest provided so far by New Delhi to any other country. This was over and above the existing 100 million USD line of credit provided for offshore patrol boats for Vietnam's Coast Guard. The manufacture of patrol boats has been undertaken by Indian firm Larsen and Toubro.

There has been a move afoot by some of the Indian Defence Public Sector Undertakings to increase their defence exports. Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL) has entered the market to export a variety of anti-tank guided missiles (Konkur and Milan ATGMs) and surface to air missiles (Akash missile systems) etc. BDL is believed to have entered into preliminary discussions with various countries including Vietnam to tap the export potential of the weapon systems. Some reports indicate that India has identified 15 weapon systems for exports including Astra beyond-visual range air to air missiles, Prahar surface to surface missiles, light combat aircraft (LCA), BrahMos supersonic cruise missile, SONARs, Arjun Mk-2 battle tanks, airborne early warning systems, battlefield surveillance radars and a variety of unmanned systems. Sometime ago, the Defence Minister had stated that 10 percent of missile systems may be exported.⁴⁶ Additionally, as mentioned earlier, to exploit the Vietnamese and South East Asian market for defence exports, Bharat Electronics has opened an office in Hanoi.

Further, the then President Tan Dai Quang of Vietnam during his visit to India in February-March 2018 had noted that *"defense and security have been the effective strategic areas of cooperation. India has actively supported Vietnam in training, capacity building, defense technology transfer and defense credit"*.⁴⁷ Thus, there is a great scope for Indo-Vietnam defence cooperation; India should not only export a number of defence weapon systems but also help Vietnam in developing its indigenous defence sector. Cooperation in cyber and space capabilities, sharing of intelligence; supporting Vietnam in establishing and development of its C4ISR systems are some of the areas of

cooperation that would strengthen the mutual strategic bonds. Enhancing of defence and security ties would substantially contribute to maintaining peace and stability in the region as also such efforts are aimed at addressing their strategic and security concerns in the region.

Philippines: Defence Engagement is at Low Key

By virtue of its location on the east and Southeast of South China Sea the Philippines archipelago plays a significant geo-strategic role in the regional geopolitics. Historically, major powers have sought close ties with Manila to pursue their power politics. While the Philippines under President Duterte is leaning towards China yet it remains a treaty ally of the US. Even after the Permanent Court of Arbitration's award regarding Scarborough Shoal and allied issues concerning the South China Sea in favour of Philippines and against China, President Duterte chose to cozy up to China supposedly for economic benefits accruing from Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative. However, the existing defence relationship with America has not been entirely abandoned and continues. In fact, during May 2019, US, Indian, Philippines naval ships, for the first time carried out joint naval exercises in South China Sea. Philippines' Secretary of Defence, Maj. Gen. (retd.) Delfin Lorenzana, during his remarks at Shangri La Dialogue of 2019 clarified that Philippines and ASEAN supported Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPS) to keep South China Sea free and open.⁴⁸

On the economic front, Philippines' economy has been growing at steady pace with a growth projected as 6.5 percent for 2018 by the IMF. With a population of around 108 million and a GDP per capita of 3250 USD its total GDP for 2018⁴⁹ is estimated to be 357 billion USD, third largest amongst the ASEAN.

On the security front, Philippines Armed Forces have faced security challenges in the past from a variety of insurgent groups mostly communist and have achieved a fair degree of success against them. In May 2017, Muslim insurgents of the Maute Group, an Islamic State-sympathetic outfit, had taken over Marawi City in Southern Philippines; the city was recaptured by the armed forces after a heavy fight and number of casualties.⁵⁰ In recent times the armed forces have also been employed to carry out operations to neutralize major drugs networks and syndicates. Countering terrorism and radicalization, bolstering maritime domain awareness, meeting the challenges of non-traditional threats of security are areas where both Philippines and India have common perceptions.

Despite India's strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific with particular reference to South China Sea as also for realizing the goals of its Act East Policy, New Delhi's level of defence cooperation efforts with the Philippines have been of much lower order. There is a bilateral Agreement on Defence Cooperation of 2006 that enables training exchanges, high level visits, study tours and port calls by Naval and Coast Guard ships. Recent developments in the bilateral defence engagement include the visit to Philippines in September 2018 of two naval ships, one a multi-role stealth frigate and another

an anti-submarine corvette as part of commemoration of 25th anniversary of India-ASEAN relations; the naval ships also visited other ports in South East Asia.

In addition, during PM Narendra Modi's visit to Philippines for attending ASEAN Summit in November 2017, a bilateral MOU on Defence Industry and Logistics Cooperation was signed; the MOU covered acquisition and export of defence articles and mutual logistics support and services, and cooperation in the development, production and procurement of defence materials.⁵¹

Earlier, in March 2017 the second Philippines-India Joint Defense Cooperation Committee (JDCC) Meeting was held in New Delhi; considering that the second meeting came five years after the first such meeting in 2012 it is quite apparent that building of a strong bilateral defence relationship has not received adequate attention. During the meeting there was an exchange of views on Asia-Pacific regional security, cooperation on ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting (ADMM/ADMM-Plus), ASEAN Regional Forum Security Policy Conference (ASPC), and defense modernization in the Asia-Pacific.

However, in order to impart momentum to the bilateral defence ties, the Philippines Defence Secretary Delfin Lorenzana along with a six member delegation had visited India in March 2018.⁵² Besides discussions with Indian Defense Minister Nirmala Sitharaman the delegation also visited the Indian Western Naval Command in Mumbai and companies which manufacture defense-related supplies and equipment. It needs to be remembered that in 2016 the Philippines had accepted the lowest bid of Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers Ltd. (GRSE) of India for supply of two Frigates to their Navy. However, there was rebidding and some domestic controversy in Philippines and the contract was not given to GRSE. Nevertheless, there is tremendous scope for mutual cooperation in the areas of defence technologies, naval vessels, missiles and in space & cyber space.

There exists a Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism, which looks at mutual cooperation on the fight against terrorism. India has been conducting cyber security training as also on de-radicalization of the Philippine security personnel. In July 2017 India had also supported the Philippines with a financial assistance of 500,000 USD for rehabilitation of Marawi people affected by terrorists of Maute group affiliated with ISIS.⁵³ India has also been regularly extending HADR aid to Philippines during such calamities like typhoons and earthquakes.

India needs to upgrade defence relationship with the Philippines given its several strategic attributes besides its being an eastern flank guard of South China Sea. It has the potential of reverting back to its strong strategic relationship with the United States and thus becoming an important player in balancing efforts vis-a-vis China. Change of orientation in Philippines' strategic outlook could also provide additional options to India in pursuit of its Act East policy and also a degree of heft to India's approach to the concept of Indo-Pacific.

Defence Diplomacy with Cambodia and Laos

India's strong cultural linkages with countries like Cambodia and Laos are well known. Cambodia's Angkor Wat temples and Shiva and other Hindu deities' temples in Laos depict the presence India's civilizational links since 13th Century and even earlier. India was also Chairman of the International Control Commission for Indo-China set up in 1954 in the aftermath of French withdrawal. That was one of the earliest engagements of Indian military with the Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. While over the years the defence and security cooperation with Vietnam has grown in a robust manner, defence ties with Cambodia and Laos have remained somewhat not up to the desired level which could largely be due to overwhelming Chinese presence in these nations. Beijing's influence in Laos and Cambodia is quite strong because of economic allurements offered by China due to its Belt and Road Initiative projects as also due to strong relationships at the Communist Parties' level. However, India is viewed in a positive light and its connectivity efforts and other programmes under Ganga-Mekong Initiative, CMLV (Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, and Vietnam) and India's Act East policy find positive resonance in both the nations.

Like Vietnam, both Cambodia and Laos are being ruled by Communist Parties even though Cambodia's Constitution of 1993 provides for a parliamentary constitutional monarchy. Nevertheless, both countries have been growing with an average growth rates of around 7 percent but both the nations are still some of the poorest countries in the region. While they have rich natural resources in the shape of hydro power potential and minerals etc., exploitation of such resources is dominated by China. Further, Chinese military's ties with Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF) have been growing with Beijing becoming the largest military aid provider to Cambodia. There are reports that indicate that China is developing a port on the Cambodian coast that could be for dual use purposes with the possibility of being converted into a military base.⁵⁴

At the same time, Cambodia's engagement with the US military has been following a downward trajectory. Vietnam's special military-to-military relationship with Cambodia has also been undermined by China's strong political and military relationship with Cambodia. Similarly, China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) has been expanding its ties with Laotian military through a variety of ways though Vietnam military also has forged a strong defence relationship with Vientiane. Both Cambodia and Laos are largely in the Chinese camp especially when it comes to decision making in the ASEAN and undermining the concept of ASEAN centrality. Cambodia is especially known for preventing issue of any Joint Statement or formulation that is seen as going against Chinese interests during ASEAN Summit.

India has been endeavouring to strengthen relationship with both Cambodia and Laos. As mentioned above, the earliest defence relationship was formed when the India provided an infantry

battalion part and supporting staff under the aegis of the UN for control of Indo-China (Cambodia, Laos & Vietnam) from 1954 to 1970. Later, again an Indian battalion was based in Cambodia as part of the UN Transition Authority in 1992-93 after the Paris Peace accord. However, this relationship has not progressed beyond a preliminary level. India has been training the RCAF troops on demining since 2007 as numerous conflicts and wars have left the countryside strewn with large number of unmarked minefields. India has also been training the RCAF in UN Peace Keeping Operations since 2010. Under capacity building project India has also been training defence personnel in India's Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme.⁵⁵ For instance, while for 2017-18, 11 vacancies were allotted to Cambodia's Defence Ministry, for year 2018-2019 these were increased to 15 which, in any case, is not much of an increase. Under the ITEC Agreement Indian Army Training Team has carried out training of Lao personnel in English, Computers and Basic Tactics besides conducting training capsules in unexploded explosives and de-mining.

During the bilateral meeting on the sidelines of ASEAN Heads of states invitation as Special Guest on the occasion of India's Republic Day celebrations in January 2018 PM Modi had affirmed to the visiting Cambodian counterpart Hun Sen that India will strengthen '*ties in key areas of defence, security and counter- terrorism*'.⁵⁶ Both sides did express the desire to enhance cooperation in maritime domain, including preservation of marine and coastal environment, anti-piracy cooperation, security of sea lanes of communication to maintain peace and ensure safety and security of navigation in the Indo-Pacific Region. But no specific steps to achieve such outcomes were mentioned.

Though the RCAF have limited size and capabilities they are in the process of modernization. Therefore, they need considerable support to build their military training institutions and establishments as also in terms of defence equipment and weapon systems. The requirements of both these countries in terms of building a 'defensive and administrative' Air Force are very modest. Even a little support will give results which are out of proportion. Additionally, in case of Laos, while the country is land locked but the Mekong River runs through major part of the country. Development of a 'Riverine Navy' merits consideration, for assisting in maintaining security and in creating IWT facilities.

Defence Cooperation: Brunei

Brunei is a member of the Commonwealth, ASEAN and some regional and international organizations. It is also a member of the Five Power Defence Agreement which includes the UK, Australia, New Zealand and Singapore that aimed at discouraging regional powers like Malaysia and Indonesia from causing trouble to the tiny nation. The UK has positioned a battalion of Royal Gurkha Rifles for security duties in Brunei. The Royal Brunei Armed Forces have a strength of around 10,000. However, because of its strategic location and oil resources its significance and relevance to regional

politics and economic scenario cannot be overlooked. At the political level, Brunei has been supportive of India's Act East Policy as also India's growing relationship with ASEAN.

Indian naval ships have been regularly visiting Brunei on goodwill visits and have also participated in Brunei International Fleet Review in July 2011 to celebrate 50th anniversary of Royal Brunei Armed Forces. Similarly, Brunei naval ships have been taking part in India's joint naval exercises of Milan series. In addition, both sides have also participated in each other's Defence Expos. There have also been visits by both sides by military leaders and staff for strengthening defence relationship both at bilateral level as well as at multilateral level (i.e. at ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus).⁵⁷ During Vice President Hamid Ansari's visit to Brunei in July 2018 India and Brunei agreed to further enhance defence ties through exchange of experience, information, training and trainers; conduct of joint military exercises, seminars and discussions; and cooperation between the defence industries.

It is quite evident that India needs to build on its defence and security relationship with Cambodia, Laos and Brunei. India's enhanced political and defence engagement with these countries might have some effect on balancing China's rising influence in these countries.

India-ASEAN Multi-lateral Defence Cooperation

India is part of ASEAN Defence Ministers Plus (ADDMP) framework which includes ten ASEAN countries and eight other nations. Thus, this multilateral group of 18 countries pursues cooperation in maritime security, counter-terrorism, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, peacekeeping operations and military medicine. India's defence forces have been participating in the annual joint exercises being conducted under the mechanism. In 2013, a new area of cooperation, i.e. Humanitarian Mine Action was included in ADDMP plus charter; cyber security was another area of cooperation that was added in 2016. India had conducted ADMM-Plus Humanitarian Mine Action and Peacekeeping Operations Exercise Force 18 in Pune in March 2016. The overall objective of the joint exercises is to strengthen the capability and inter-operability of the ADMM-Plus armed forces to effectively respond to terrorism, maritime threats and a variety of other challenges. Engagement with ADDM plus militaries serves to achieve India's objectives of its Act East Policy; it is also part of India's overall policy of supporting and positively contributing to ASEAN-led mechanisms.

At another level, most of the ASEAN member countries have been taking part in India led Milan series of joint naval exercises. The last joint naval Milan exercise was held in 2018 wherein except for Laos (a landlocked country) all the other ASEAN navies participated. Thus, these joint naval exercises were to an extent a military/security component of India's policies in the neighbourhood. Largely, the exercises carried out by the Navies are aimed to create a forum for the littoral Navies of

the region to exchange thoughts in the area of maritime cooperation and to practicing drills for HADR and many such non-traditional security challenges.

While in the initial years only few countries like India, Indonesia, Singapore and Thailand, all on the littoral of Bay of Bengal took part in the first edition of Milan exercises, over a period of time many other countries' Navies joined in for the manoeuvres. Malaysia joined in 1997; Australia and Myanmar joined in 2007. Brunei, Cambodia, the Philippines, Seychelles and Vietnam joined in 2012. In addition to promoting professional interactions Milan exercises like any joint military exercises also became a platform for promoting interoperability, social and cultural interactions. These exercises are held under the aegis of India's tri-service Command based in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands which is closer to Myanmar, Thailand and Indonesia compared to the Indian mainland. These islands are strategically located and thus enable Indian Navy to keep watch over the shipping traffic/naval vessels exiting or entering Malacca, Sundae and to an extent Lombok Straits. Participation in such joint exercises also indicates a congruence of security perceptions of South East Asian nations and India.

In addition, India has regularly been taking part in Indonesia led KOMODO joint naval exercises since its commencement in 2014. These exercises are primarily focused on HADR. The third iteration of the joint exercise took place off the shores of Lombok straits of Indonesia in May 2018. The exercises involve command post exercises, medical civil action projects, field training exercise; a sailing pass and a variety of cultural activities. Maritime interception, search and rescue and learning from each other's best practices are some of the other facets of such manoeuvres.

Strengthening Defence Diplomacy with ASEAN Countries: Some Recommendations and Observations

It is axiomatic that differential strategies would need to be followed with each of the ten countries of the ASEAN given the political and strategic context and degree and extent to which such countries share their security perceptions with India. On the other hand, it can also be said that with the global and regional dynamics remaining in a state of flux it should be India's effort to build on the existing defence and security relationships as also strive to enhance such an engagement with other members of ASEAN whose interests are more inclined towards China or elsewhere. Most of these nations see India as somewhat of a benign balancer in the South East Asian region. As India's economic and military power grows India is more likely to be able to contribute better to peace and stability in the region. Thus, defence diplomacy should continue to be a significant part of India's bilateral engagements with all the ASEAN members.

Undoubtedly, Myanmar with which India has both land and maritime boundaries should continue to receive top priority in our defence diplomacy as any adverse strategic developments there

could severely impact India's interests. Both Myanmar and Thailand are part of the BIMSTEC therefore, defence and security relationship with both need to be enhanced.

Further, Indonesia which is emerging as natural leader of ASEAN and is modernizing its armed forces, offers many opportunities for India to cooperate in defence production and connected aspects. Therefore, defence relationship with Indonesia needs to be developed on priority basis. Some aspects of cooperation with ASEAN countries have already been outlined in preceding paras. Defence cooperation with Singapore stands at a good stead while India needs to work more on its defence relationship with Malaysia.

It also must be noted that India does not have Defence Attachés posted to Philippines, Laos and Cambodia. Instead, Philippines is accredited to Defence Wing at Singapore while Laos and Cambodia are accredited to India's Defence Wing at Hanoi. This arrangement needs to be reviewed if close defence and security relationship with these countries is to be sought.

Clearly, Myanmar, Vietnam and Singapore should continue to remain the key pillar of India's Act East policy with further cementing the defence cooperative relationship. Indonesia also remains equally important for geostrategic and geopolitical reasons. While priorities of engagement with SE Asian countries can be laid down as Myanmar, Vietnam, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Philippines and Brunei yet these need to be flexible and should conform to ongoing changes in strategic and security environment. Because of resource constraints, besides prioritizing, it may also be useful to evolve some guidelines on nature and content of defence ties based on furthering nation's strategic interests.

At the policy formulation and organizational level, at present, the aspects of international defence cooperation are being handled by Planning and International Cooperation (PIC) wing of the Ministry of Defence (MOD). Services Headquarters or HQ Integrated Defence Staff mostly remain implementing authorities. Evidently, there needs to be a good degree of integration of functions for better coordination and therefore, for better outcomes. Defence Diplomacy subcommittee of the Defence Planning Committee formed in 2018 for devising defence engagements in consonance with our foreign policy objectives should become a top level coordinating mechanism.

While in recent years, some armed forces officers have been posted in the MEA, the coordination between MOD and MEA on aspects of defence diplomacy need to be improved. An integrated and holistic approach to defence diplomacy needs to be adopted with different countries requiring different levels of engagements as explained earlier. For instance, it might be useful to have an armed forces officer in ASEAN Multilateral Division of MEA for cooperation on maritime security, counter-terrorism, anti-piracy and many such common security concerns.

Defence attachés (DAs) should not only be conversant with our own defence export and import policies but also with indigenous defence production capabilities. They need to keep track of what the host nation might expect from India as part of defence cooperation. Obviously, DAs would be required to keep themselves abreast with political, strategic and technical developments especially those which impact defence and security arenas. Evidently, increasing awareness about India's defence capabilities would help DAs to implement ongoing defence and security cooperation policies.

It needs to be noted that of late, the MOD has been getting its military attaches posted abroad to come back and attend events like Aero-India show to acquaint themselves with India's capabilities in producing indigenous defence equipment, systems and technologies. One of the prime objectives of such an initiative is to help the country in exploring defence export opportunities. For Aero-India 2019 held in Bengaluru in February, over 40 Indian DAs attended the event. In April 2018, 44 Indian DAs had taken part in Def Expo-2018 held at Chennai. Later in December 2018, the Government also came out with its '*Strategy for Defence Exports*'⁵⁸ that among many other aspects, included constitution of an export promotion body, a Defence Exports Steering Committee, use of offset mechanisms for enhancing defence export capabilities and emphasized on coordination between various ministries. While an annual review of such a strategy has been planned for, unless there is an effective implementation of such a strategy it is unlikely to bear any positive results.

While India showcased capabilities of its Brahmos supersonic Cruise Missile during the International Maritime Defence Exhibition Asia 2019 (IMDEX Asia 2019) held in mid-May, there are still some perceptions that the Indian Government is very cautious about exporting such an item to SE Asian countries due to the strategic nature of the weapon system.⁵⁹ Successful test firings of anti-ship version of Brahmos missile as well as for land and air versions have been carried out in May and June 2019 as also in earlier years. There are also indications that Indian Government is considering offering defence systems on line-of-credit on the same lines as the Foreign Military Sales programme of the United States. Therefore, it is time for Indian government to clarify its stance on export of Brahmos to some of the South East Asian countries which have expressed their willingness to obtain such a system.

Further, after the new government took over in May 2019, it set a target of defence exports worth Rs. 35,000 crores to be achieved by 2025 which is undoubtedly a very ambitious target. According to an estimate, the defence exports have more than doubled to Rs. 10,745 crore in 2018-19 from Rs. 4,682 crore in 2017-18⁶⁰ due to several measures taken by the Government. Moreover, the DAs would be given a budget of up to \$50,000 each for promoting made-in-India defence products from both public and private undertakings.⁶¹ These funds are also meant for participating in exhibitions, carrying out market surveys, organizing seminars and promoting publicity of products available for exports. The new scheme is designed to enable DAs to explore new markets for defence exports as also to promote

all the connected activities in the countries they are posted to. Among the South East Asian countries special emphasis is expected to be paid to exporting defence products to Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia and Myanmar. Thus, it can be easily surmised that DAs would have much larger role to play in defence diplomacy in the coming years, and especially so in South East Asia which can be said to be the 'Global Fulcrum' or center of Indo-Pacific.

Another point to reflect over is that whether the defence cooperation can be structured in a manner which generates perceptions that India can emerge as a long-term and assured source of defense needs of countries in SE Asia free of any political or other limitations. For instance, Russia has a history of defence exports to countries in this region without any complications. In addition, DAs could also look at host country's Homeland Security needs and identify as to what kind of equipment these countries might need, for instance, vehicles, small arms, off shore patrol boats, electronic and surveillance means and a variety of such other security impedimenta.

India's cartographic satellites could provide cartographic data to SE Asian nations in consonance with their requirements. Similarly, India has arrangements to for obtaining Maritime Domain Awareness which could be shared with ASEAN countries as a part of maritime cooperation with them. Thus, space cooperation can also emerge as an important segment of defence and security cooperation with ASEAN countries.

Lastly, avenues for forging trilateral cooperation on defence and strategic issues should also be explored. For instance, India, Vietnam and a third country with shared security perceptions could be opted in a trilateral arrangement.

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