



Security Challenges for Indian Democracy: An Analysis from the Act East Policy Perspective

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DOI : <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15857552>

ARTICLE DETAILS

Research Paper

Accepted: 26-06-2025

Published: 10-07-2025

Keywords:

*Democracy, South Asian,
East Asian, Act East Policy,
Security, Insurgency.*

ABSTRACT

The current issue of security centres on a set of significant challenges that impact India's democracy and national security. The environment profile of the area is influenced by its surroundings, and it is crucial to develop an engagement strategy to address these factors. To establish a more cohesive region with potential collaborators that would yield overall benefits. India's act east policy, introduced in 2014, seeks to strengthen India's economic and strategic ties with countries in the eastern region. Relations with Asian Countries India grapples with multiple security threats. Emerging areas of conflict and contention are being observed. In this era of advanced technology, security threats and challenges have become increasingly complex and diverse. The Impact of Globalization on the World Economy, India's act east policy is a strategic initiative designed to strengthen India's relations with countries in the eastern region. Economic, cultural, and security connections with Southeast Asia and the broader Indo-Pacific region. This policy has greatly enhanced India's regional influence, and it also provides a sense of security. Obstacles that affect the functioning of



Indian democracy. These challenges stem from cross-border insurgency, Maritime security concerns, economic weaknesses, and China's increasing presence in India's and the North-eastern region. This paper analyses the impact of act east policy on India's security landscape. Recognizing potential dangers and suggesting strategies to minimize risks while preserving democratic values.

Introduction

India's act east policy is a strategic initiative designed to strengthen economic, cultural, and social ties with countries in the eastern region. Additionally, the government has strengthened its security ties with Southeast Asia and the broader Indo-Pacific region. Although this policy has been implemented, it has yet to be seen what impact it will have. Significantly enhanced India's regional influence, it also poses security challenges that need to be addressed. Influence on Indian Democracy. These challenges stem from cross-border insurgency, maritime terrorism. Security concerns, economic weaknesses, and China's increasing presence in India's northern regions pose significant challenges. Eastern region. This paper analyses the impact of act east policy on India's security landscape. Recognizing potential dangers and suggesting strategies to minimize risks while preserving democratic values. India's act east policy, introduced in 2014 as an extension of the look east policy, aimed to strengthen economic and cultural ties with countries in the eastern region. (1991), with the goal of strengthening ties between the countries in Southeast Asia, seeks to enhance the association's involvement. Asian and other East Asian partners while the policy seeks economic expansion, it may have negative consequences for the environment, Infrastructure development, and diplomatic engagement.

India has taken over its export promotion-driven growth strategy since 1991 to observe the growth effect after the Gulf War (1990-91) and trade in the East Southeast Asia is concentrated in the West and Soviet presence. Since 1991, India has shifted its focus from export promotion to a more balanced growth strategy, taking into account various factors and considerations. The company aims to expand and expand its growth after the Gulf War (1990-91) and subsequent economic downturn. Trade in the east Southeast Asia is primarily concentrated in the west and Soviet-controlled regions. In 1992, Indian former Prime Minister, P. V. Narasimha Rao, was the leader of the opposition. Rao unveiled the "look east" policy, which aims to leverage both economic and strategic factors. India's relations with Southeast Asian countries are aimed at strengthening its position as a regional power. China and its strategic impact serve



as a command and a counterbalance to the strategic impact of the United States. This is the end of our result. The guidelines start with a strategic failure to involve India from the Southeast Asia region. It also plays a crucial role in contributing economically to India's national interests. And: Security, and India is taking steps to enhance its reputation as an economy and a secure nation. The style of the building is unique to the area.

While the look east policy concentrated on the Asian countries and economic integration, it also aimed to foster closer ties with other nations in the region. The act east policy incorporates East Asian countries and defence and security cooperation into the asean framework. The topic of the passage is the impact of economic integration on countries. This act aims to expand India's eastern policy. Shifting attention to the thriving economies of Southeast Asian countries from the west and neighbouring nations, the focus of the discussion among other things. The policy encompasses political, defence, and cultural aspects, in addition to. Economic initiative with the establishment of an organizational structure to facilitate the exchange of ideas and collaboration. Teamwork the 4Cs – culture, commerce, connectivity, and capacity building – are specifically tailored to address the unique needs of the region. Emphasized in the policy of the east. This paper provides an extensive examination of these challenges. And their significance for Indian political system

Objectives:

- Enhance economic integration and collaboration, cultural connections and strengthen the strategic cooperation and correlation between countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Method of effortless participation at bilateral. Global and regional levels.
- Explore more trade business investment partners beyond conventional business allies the focus of this paper is on the countries of the Pacific region, with a particular emphasis on their economic development in the South East Asian region.
- Strengthen cooperation in maintaining steadiness and peace in the region as well as Promoting defence through adherence to global norms and laws, while actively combating terrorism.

Methodology:

The study based on the qualitative research method. To enrich the present work the secondary data will be collected from the books, journals, articles, research papers, government documents and various websites. The study also adopted comparative and analytical method in order to compare Indian position in South East Asian nations through its Act East Policy (AEP) regime.



Security Challenges of Indian Democracy:

When the Act East Policy enrich seeks economic growth, infrastructure development, and Diplomatic engagement, it also brings several security concerns.

Key security challenges include:

1. Insurgency and Border Security in the Northeast: The north-eastern states of India host a varied assortment of ethnic communities, each possessing its unique distinct culture and heritage. These factions have frequently confronted one another, in addition to the Indian government, regarding matters like land, resources, and political representation. The insurgency in Northeast India pertains to the persistent armed struggle in the north-eastern area of India, encompassing numerous ethnic-driven militant factions. These organizations seek to accomplish more significant self-governance or freedom for their individual communities. The dispute stems from historical complaints, ethnic conflicts, and requests for political, economic, and cultural entitlements. The Indian administration has utilized military actions, dialogue, and development programs to tackle the matter. Despite advancements achieved via peace treaties and growth projects, difficulties continue in settling the disputes and tackling foundational problems of exclusion and self-identity.

India's Northeastern States (Assam, Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram, etc.) have long struggled with insurgency and ethnic conflict. AEP's push for greater connectivity exposes this region to:

- **Cross-border insurgency:** Groups like ULFA (United Liberation Front of Asom) have safe havens in Myanmar.
- **Illegal migration:** Open borders with Myanmar and Bangladesh fuel demographic changes and social tensions.
- **Drug and arms trafficking:** The Golden Triangle (Myanmar-Thailand-Laos) remains a hotspot for illegal trade, impacting regional stability.

The **India-Myanmar border, with its free movement regime (FMR)**, is exploited by insurgent groups and criminals, complicating India's internal security.

Impact on Democracy:

- Increased insurgency challenges law enforcement, weakening democratic governance.
- Unchecked migration alters demographic patterns, leading to social unrest.
- Security crackdowns in insurgent-prone areas lead to human rights concerns.

2. Maritime and Cybersecurity Threats: The maritime sector finds itself at a pivotal moment, where the urgent demand for technological progress converges with the imperative to fortify cybersecurity



defences. Maritime cybersecurity involves safeguarding computer systems and digital tools within the maritime industry, as well as the interconnected network of components that comprise the maritime ecosystem. Maritime cybersecurity encompasses the set of tools, policies, security concepts, protective measures, guidelines, risk management strategies, actions, training, best practices, assurances, and technologies designed to safeguard maritime entities, their ships, and their cyber landscape. Many interconnected networks and infrastructures at sea still rely on outdated technologies that were not intended for internet connectivity. These intricate networks consist of a mixture of information technology and operational technology systems employed by internal staff and external vendors, increasing the risk of compromise by hackers or insider threats.

Act East Policy enhances India's involvement with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Quad nations (India, the United States, Japan, and Australia) in the Indo-Pacific region. However, India faces multiple maritime security risks:

- China's assertiveness in the South China Sea impacts regional stability.
- Piracy and smuggling threaten Indian trade routes.
- Illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing affects India's maritime economy.

India's efforts to secure the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, enhance naval cooperation, and expand defence exports are steps toward countering these threats.

Impact on Democracy:

- Increased defence spending may divert resources from social development.
- Rising military tensions could justify government restrictions on civil liberties.

3. China's Strategic Influence the Indo- Pacific Region: In China's strategic impact the Indo-Pacific is complex, involving economic, diplomatic, and military aspects. It is marked by bold movements in the South China Sea, the growth of its naval presence in the Indian Ocean, and the implementation of infrastructure initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to wield influence. At the same time, China aims to create alliances and enhance economic collaboration in the region, while also addressing the "Indo-Pacific" notion with a careful and sceptical approach.

- **Southern China Sea:** China's development of artificial islands and military bases in the South China Sea, along with its forceful territorial claims, has sparked worries regarding navigation freedom and regional stability.
- **Indian Sea:** China has notably boosted its naval force in the Indian Ocean, incorporating the use of submarines and surface warships, which has sparked worries regarding its capacity to exert influence and possibly surround crucial shipping lanes.



- **Strategic Constriction Points:** China's infrastructure spending, especially via the BRI, is viewed as a method to enhance its power in the area and possibly secure entry to critical choke points.
- **Economic Impact: BRI:** The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) significantly enhances China's economic influence in the Indo-Pacific through its investments in regional Infrastructure projects.
- **Regional Economic Integration:** China is keen on advancing economic integration and collaboration in the Indo-Pacific by means of initiatives such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).
- **Engagements at Both Bilateral and Multilateral Levels:** China participates in both bilateral and multilateral diplomacy with nations in the Indo-Pacific to forge alliances and advance its interests. Reaction to the "Indo-Pacific" Idea: China has condemned the "Indo-Pacific" idea, seeing it as a U.S.-driven effort to curb its influence. Nevertheless, China has also been involved in efforts that align with the Indo-Pacific vision.

China remains a major security concern for India under AEP due to:

- **Border tensions in Arunachal Pradesh** and Doklam standoff (2017).
- **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**, influencing India's neighbours (Myanmar, Bangladesh).
- **Digital and cyber threats**, including Chinese surveillance risks.

4. **Economic Dependencies and Strategic Risks:** Economic performance and capacity undoubtedly form the basis of national security and strength for a developing country such as India. India possesses the military strength to protect its territorial integrity and security; however, it must maintain elevated economic growth rates to change the strategic equilibrium in Asia and worldwide, benefiting its development. With that in mind, the author contends that it is not merely economic growth that determines India's global standing and influence, but rather the characteristics of that growth process and the way in which current economic challenges are tackled. The danger to what has recently been characterized as 'homeland security' arises from social and economic stagnation, the disparities and political instability it creates, as well as the nature of economic progress.

AEP promotes trade with ASEAN but increases India's reliance on global markets. Key concerns include:

- **Supply chain disruptions** (COVID-19 showed risks of over-reliance on China).
- **Lack of manufacturing self-sufficiency**, affecting employment.
- **Trade imbalances with Southeast Asia**, increasing economic dependency.

**Impact on Democracy:**

- Economic instability can lead to **political unrest and protests**.
- Dependency on foreign markets may limit **policy sovereignty**.
- Rising economic inequality could weaken **social harmony**.

Act East Policy and Security Dimensions

The Act East Policy prioritizes connectivity, trade, and strategic partnerships with ASEAN and beyond. It includes initiatives such as:

Infrastructure Development: The act east policy emphasizes connectivity, trade, and strategic partnerships with asean and beyond, with a focus on security dimensions. It encompasses various projects, including the kaladan multi-modal transit project, which was jointly identified by India and Myanmar. The main objective was to establish a different path that would link the northeastern region with the mainland of India. Recently, the first ship was dispatched from syama prasad mookerjee port in kolkata to formally launch the operations at sittwe port in Myanmar, part of the kaladana multimodal transit transport project (kmttp). The successful completion of the project is vital and significant for India's trade and connectivity, especially concerning the northeastern region. The initiative was created to provide an alternative route to the north-eastern region of India and contribute to its economic development. As a crucial connectivity project, it will strengthen economic, commercial, and strategic ties between India and Myanmar. The kaladan multi modal transit transport project was collaboratively recognized by India and Myanmar to establish a multi-modal transport system for moving cargo from the eastern ports of India to Myanmar and to the north-eastern region of India via Myanmar. The agreement is anticipated to strengthen the economic, commercial, and strategic connections between India and Myanmar, as well as establish maritime routes and promote economic growth in the north-eastern states. This multimodal transit route will fulfil the strategic needs of the nation by guaranteeing easy access to both northeast and southeast Asia. It signifies a major breakthrough in advancing the objectives of the act east policy and promoting regional integration as well. Consequently, industrial expansion and capitalizing on tourism.

In 1991, when the policy of looking east was implemented to establish political connections with the East, the country experienced significant changes. The south-eastern countries of Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Indonesia, Singapore, Vietnam, and Laos, the Philippines, and Brunei Darussalam have played a significant role in India's history. Since that time, the number of people relying on the Internet has grown dramatically. In 2014, the government has been actively working towards enhancing India's ties with South Asia. East Asian countries, as part of the act east policy, which was later renamed from



the look east policy. The kaladan multi-modal project encompasses many aspects. Intersection of Roads and Canals. Will reduce travel durations, decrease transportation expenses, and boost trade between India and other countries.

Maritime Collaboration: The Indo-Pacific region has become a significant hub for international collaboration. Geopolitics, reshaping international interactions and economic growth patterns. India's: Having a strategic perspective on this area has a significant impact on regional stability and navigation. Freedom, and the balance of power in the vast region that extends from the eastern border. Africa's Coastal Regions from the Atlantic to the Pacific. The India's evolving stance towards the India-China relations. The Pacific region, emphasizing its commitment to regional stability, freedom of navigation, and influence, is a key area of focus for the United States. Balance: It outlines crucial initiatives like the east policy, the Sagar vision, and the. The Indo-Pacific Ocean Initiative, aimed at enhancing economic ties and strengthening regional cooperation, has been launched. Form partnerships, and foster regional stability. The government launched the Act East policy in 2014, which aimed to increase trade and investment between the East and West. Expands upon the 1990s look east policy. It aims to broaden India's involvement with Southeast Asia. Asia and the wider Indo-Pacific region can be strengthened by promoting economic collaboration and strategic partnerships. Collaboration, interconnection, and cultural bonds with Southeast Asian nations. It aims to fortify relationship with Japan.

India's economic strategies in the Indo-Pacific region demonstrate its increasing influence and dedication to fostering economic growth. To local development. These strategies aim to enhance connectivity, promote economic growth, and foster innovation. Collaboration, and maintain a rules-based international order. By utilizing its advantageous position. In the Indo-Pacific and deepening diplomatic ties, India aims to unlock the economic potential of the region. The government aims to create a favourable environment for businesses while maintaining stability and predictability in trade and investment. A crucial element of this approach is the collaboration with Japan, established in response to the situation. To China's One Belt and One Road Initiative (OBOR). This partnership has resulted in the growth of the Asia-Africa region. Corridor, serving as a link between Asia and Africa via the Indian Ocean, providing an alternative route to China. Maritime Silk Road. (Times of India 2024). India's act east policy strengthened ties with ASEAN. A significant trading partner Asian represented 11 percent of India's global trade, with their trade volume being significant. The total revenue of the industry is projected to reach \$122.67 billion in the fiscal year 2023-24 (Ministry of Commerce and Industry, n.d.)

Defence Cooperation: The function of ASEAN in bolstering regional security and economic Stability via defence collaboration is growing ever more crucial in reaction to changing global



Geopolitical and economic issues. This research utilizes a qualitative methodology, particularly a literature review method, to examine ASEAN's frameworks for promoting defence cooperation and its effects on the stability of the region. At the heart of this examination are essential efforts like the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) and ADMM-Plus, have improved regional safety via collaborative military drills, sharing intelligence, and efforts in maritime security. These efforts have played a crucial role in easing disputes, especially in contentious regions such as the South China Sea.

Maritime security is also an important focus in ASEAN defence cooperation, given the importance of sea lanes to regional trade and economies. Cooperation in maritime security helps maintain freedom of navigation and the security of sea lanes vital to international trade.

For example, ASEAN has adopted various initiatives to enhance maritime security, such as the ASEAN Maritime Forum (AMF) and cooperation with dialogue partners such as the United States and China in dealing with threats such as piracy and smuggling (Toruan, 2021). By keeping sea lanes secure, ASEAN can ensure the smooth flow of goods and services that are essential to the region's economic growth. Defence cooperation also plays an important role in maintaining economic stability by addressing non-traditional threats such as natural disasters and climate change. Natural disasters often have a significant impact on regional economies, and cooperation in disaster management can help minimize such impacts. The ASEAN Coordinating center for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA Centre) is a clear example of this cooperative effort. The AHA Centre serves as a regional coordination center for humanitarian assistance and disaster management, assisting member states in responding to disasters quickly and effectively (Prayaga, 202)

While these efforts enhance India's global standing, they expose the country to new security threats, particularly in its Northeast region and maritime domain.

Policy Measures to Address Security Challenges

To mitigate security threats while sustaining the Act East Policy, India must adopt a multipronged approach:

Strengthening Border Security and Counter-Insurgency Efforts

- Enhancing intelligence-sharing with Myanmar, Thailand and Bangladesh.
- Upgrading border infrastructure (roads, surveillance and fencing).
- Balancing resilient supply chains to reduce dependency on china

Manging china's influence through Strategic Diplomacy

- Countering China's BRI by strengthening regional economic projects (e.g., BBIN, BIMSTEC).
- Engaging ASEAN diplomatically to maintain regional balance.



- Improving domestic manufacturing to counteract economic vulnerabilities.

Conclusion

India's Act East Policy is a crucial component of its economic and strategic aspirations. However, it brings significant security risks that challenge Indian democracy. Border insurgency, maritime disputes, China's influence, and economic dependencies are key areas of concern.

To preserve democratic stability, India must adopt a balanced strategy enhancing security measures while upholding human rights, economic sovereignty, and diplomatic engagement. Strengthening regional partnerships and domestic resilience will be critical in ensuring that AEP continues to serve India's national interests without compromising its democratic values.

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