

India's Pathways for Regional Prominence in Asia-Pacific Prospects and Challenges

*Abhay Kumar Singh**

East of Asia, South of China: Sino-Indian Encounters in Southeast Asia by Amitav Acharya, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2017, pp. 236, \$ 40.00

India Turns East: International Engagement and US–China Rivalry by Frédéric Grare, London: C. Hurst & Co., 2017, pp. 266, \$ 45.00

Asian geopolitics currently represents a complex blending of power and paradox, both stable and fluid, with change occurring against an unresolved tension between the direction of economic growth and that of strategic anxiety. With the continent turning into the economic growth engine of the world, regional geopolitics is witnessing friction between Asian powers that had previously kept economic and political separation from one another.

A key conundrum in the Asian context is the opportunity provided by China's economic rise and the perception of latent threat posed by this extraordinary rise. Every Asia-Pacific state is hedging against this key strategic uncertainty which is underpinned by the strategic interactions between China, India and the United States (US). The US wants a closer partnership with India because it believes that the two share common

* The author is a Research Fellow at IDSA, New Delhi.



values and interests and that India can play an important stabilising role in Asia. India is pursuing relations with the US to support its own global ambitions and, more specifically, to gain access to advanced and sensitive technologies to fuel its economic growth and military prowess. India and China relations remain complicated with simultaneous existence of cooperative and conflictual impulses, defined by burgeoning bilateral trade and policy consonance on few geopolitical issues (namely, climate change and trade), competitive rivalry for geopolitical influence, and strategic mistrust due to the unresolved land boundary. In addition to the enduring Sino-Indian rivalry, there are two other factors impacting the evolutionary transformation of regional geopolitics: growing unease in the region with assertive Chinese behaviour; and intensification of the US–China rivalry. India and the US share similar concerns regarding China’s future strategic direction and Washington seems to be locked in an epic battle over the rules and leadership of the international system.

The triangular strategic dynamics between the US, India and China, and its implication on Southeast Asian geopolitics, have been explored in the two books under review. A common thread in both books is the exploration of the evolution and approach of India’s Look East policy, which began as a foreign policy initiative for deepening economic engagement with Southeast and East Asia and has progressively developed a strategic dimension.

Amitav Acharya’s book has a rather mystical title—*East of India, South of China: Sino-Indian Encounters in Southeast Asia*. Moving beyond exploration of bilateral ties between India and China, the key focus area of the book is on how Southeast Asia has dealt with India and China, sometimes on their own terms and sometimes under the influence of prevalent geopolitical currents. The central theme of the book is the geopolitical interaction between India and China in Southeast Asia. It brings together a series of reflective research highlighting some of the key events and turning points in the evolving triangular dynamics between India–China–Southeast Asia. The region of Southeast Asia has been considered as the crossroads of Asia and an arena of civilisation and power interaction between India and China. The book posits the Afro-Asian Conference at Bandung in 1955 as inflection point in the Sino-Indian interaction in Southeast Asia which shaped the future contours of the Asian regional order.

Frédéric Grare’s book, *India Turns East: International Engagement and US–China Rivalry*, focuses on the evolution of India’s Look East

policy from an economic engagement into a comprehensive strategy of political and military engagement with the countries in the Asia-Pacific. The central narrative in the book is the story of India's long and difficult journey to reclaim its status in a rapidly changing Asian environment, increasingly shaped by the US–China rivalry, unease with China's rise and uncertainties of the US' commitment to Asia's security.

EAST OF INDIA, SOUTH OF CHINA:
SINO-INDIAN ENCOUNTERS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Prior to describing Sino-Indian interaction in Southeast Asia, Acharya highlights multiple conceptions of Asia derived from ideational foundations such as civilisational linkages and normative aspirations, along with material forces of economic growth, trade interdependence and physical power. These concepts of Asia have been categorised as 'Imperialist Asia', 'Nationalist Asia', 'Universalist Asia', 'Regionalist Asia' and an incipient conception of 'Exceptionalist Asia'. A comprehensive discourse on the multiple conceptions of Asia or 'contested vision' of Asia is given in the first chapter of the book. It considers 'idea of Asia' as robustly imagined from within by the first generation of nationalist thinkers and leaders such as José Rizal of the Philippines, Sun Yat-sen of China, Jawaharlal Nehru of India, Aung San of Myanmar and Ho Chi Minh of Vietnam. The author argues that 'the richness and diversity Asian Ideas cannot be fully captured without looking at these proponents, for it was in Southeast Asia that Asian regionalism took its most decisive shape' (p. 4).

The chapter, 'The Ideas of Asia', provides the key backdrop for exploration of India's present relations and the 'Look East policy' in the light of her civilisational and historical interactions with Southeast Asia. The key issue of emphasis in this exploration is the monumental contribution of India to the classical civilisation and politics of Southeast Asia through large-scale acculturation without any colonial conquest or proselytisation. Acharya considers Indian ideational influence in South-East Asia largely a matter of 'deliberate borrowing of ideas, artistic style and modes political organisation' (p. 34) for emergence, consolidation and enlargement of local politics in the region. The quest for legitimation through Indian religious and political ideas was the key factor in the state formation process in classical Southeast Asia. Hindu devotional ideas filled an important gap in a ruler's search for authority and legitimacy. However, this large-scale acculturation process was a selective borrowing

of cultural ideation, which were adapted to conform with indigenous patterns. For example, the rigid notion of Indian caste system was rejected.

The decline of Buddhism by the twelfth century and the advent of Muslim rule contributed to the diminishing Indian influence in Southeast Asia, even though Islam came to the region via India. Further, India's commercial links with Southeast Asia were severely undermined by the arrival of European colonial powers. India's largely benign civilisational interaction with Southeast Asia has been contrasted with the coercive power interaction of Imperial China in the form of imposed hierarchical tributary in the pre-colonial period, which shapes the normative perception in the region about the two countries even today.

In the twentieth century, India's Asian identity was shaped by the common struggle for independence from Western imperialism, along with shared civilisation ties with Southeast Asia, which also deepened India's perception as a prime mover in Asia. India's new Asian romanticism in the post-colonial period and its self-perception of natural leadership in Asia was perceived by China and Japan sceptically, as they considered India as a pacifist and defeated power. Smaller nations in Asia, even as they admired Indian leaders, were also afraid of India emerging as a dominant power. These contradictions between India's self-perception and its image among Asian countries continue to persist. The book carries a suggestion for the Indian dignitaries or scholars visiting Southeast Asia to tone down their homage to India's civilising mission in the region, which can be perceived as a display of cultural arrogance. 'Just as ignoring India's monumental contribution to the classical civilization and politics of Southeast Asia would be an error, so would be the tendency to exaggerate the nature and scope of the contribution' (p. xix).

If the pre-colonial interactions between India and Southeast Asia were mediated by culture and commerce, those following the end of World War II were dominated by nationalism and a common quest for decolonisation. India played an important role in the campaign for self-determination in Southeast Asia. As an early advocate of Asian unity, Nehru tried to forge Asian cooperation by hosting the Asian Relations Conference (ARC) in 1947, which attracted delegations from all Southeast Asian countries. The conference revealed the deep differences on contemporary and political issues among the Asian nations. The book contends that while the ARC planted the seed of a Southeast Asian regional consciousness, the region sought to distance itself from pan-

Asian frameworks which could have been dominated by larger powers like India and China.

While the nascent Asian regionalism was taking roots, the Cold War dynamics between the US and Soviet started emerging in the region. With a communist government in China, the domino theory about spread of communism in Southeast Asia became a dominant geopolitical narrative. Against this geopolitical backdrop, the Bandung Conference was considered as the seminal event in the evolution of Asian regional order, and this is the key focus area of the book in Chapters 3 and 4. Nehru and Chou En-Lai's interaction at Bandung, and their approaches during the conference, has been considered a key factor in shaping Sino-Indian dynamics on the one hand, and Asian geopolitics on the other. Acharya has used numerous primary sources, including, for the first time, declassified Chinese Foreign Ministry documents about the Bandung Conference, to provide some fresh perspectives.

Nehru, as the foremost Asianist, was perhaps the most influential ideational force behind the Bandung Conference. India was not only the dominant voice in the Asia but also advocated acceptance of communist China in the region despite prevalent scepticism and apprehension in the Asian neighbourhood. At Bandung, Nehru pursued two closely related objectives. The first goal was to frustrate the American Cold War strategic design in Asia, as represented by the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), which he felt was a genuine threat to Asia's security. His second goal was to engage the People's Republic of China (PRC), which he believed to be more Asian than communist. While Nehru succeeded in delegitimising SEATO to some extent since the US-led grouping failed to elicit any new membership, he was far less successful in his efforts of rebranding China as an Asian power rather than a communist bloc member.

Nehru believed that the best chance of living in peace with China was through a regional normative framework through which the region could be assured of its peaceful intention. This effort of normative engagement with China came at considerable cost to India's credibility and position. In the contest of the charm offensive, Chou En-Lai clearly outperformed Nehru despite the latter's immense intellectual prestige. However, despite the charm offensive, China could not dispel prevalent regional suspicion and fears about Chinese intentions. The Bandung episode was, in essence, symptomatic of the differing identity of two Asian powers that were emerging from centuries of decline.

Explaining the origin of Sino-Indian rivalry, Acharya highlights B.K. Nehru's assessment that the seeds of misunderstanding between India and China were sown in Bandung as Chou misperceived Nehru's efforts to introduce him at the world stage as a bit condescending. China implicitly disagreed with India's soft stance on colonialism, and was also wary of India's willingness to compromise on the five principles. The Chinese believed that Nehru's push for non-interference was as much directed at Chinese subversion of ideological support to communist movements in the region as at Western intervention. China also had some misgivings about India's attempts at dominating both the conference and the emerging Afro-Asian bloc. In its assessment, Acharya contends that both China and India came out as 'losers' at Bandung Conference. While Nehru's perceived arrogance might have reinforced the existing concerns about India's domination of regional discourse, China was unable to dispel fears about its regional intentions. In addition, the perceived rivalry between India and China might have put off smaller and weaker nations to join either or both in forming any regional associations (p. 121).

After the high point of Bandung Conference, the regional diplomatic influence of both countries went downhill. The Sino-Indian War in 1962 eliminated all residual hopes for pan-Asianism and provided South-East Asian countries an opportunity to assert their own voice and role in regional organisation, which they did on a sub-regional basis by creating Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1967, a formulation that excluded both India and China.

Post Bandung, India's leading role in Asian regional diplomacy progressively diminished due to internal challenges, conflicts with Pakistan and perceived Soviet tilt in the 1970s. Lack of investment opportunities due to restrictive economic policy and lacklustre economic growth in comparison to the rapidly growing 'Asian Tigers' were other factors which contributed to the drift between India and countries in Southeast and East Asia. This apparent drift resulted in the exclusion of India from the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). China, in this time, made incremental gains in the region. China's economic reforms, coupled with more moderate policy towards the ASEAN, helped it to reverse the decline of its influence in Asia. Economic liberalisation and a focused 'Look East' policy were the major turning points in India's re-engagement with Southeast Asia and it gradually found its way into the regional forums as full dialogue partner of ASEAN and a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the East Asia

Summit (EAS). While India's Look East policy was initially focused on economic engagement, the growing consternation in the region due to fear of growing Chinese power created some strategic appeal for India as a potential 'regional balancer'.

In Chapter 5 on convergence and competition in the Sino-Indian dynamics, the book addresses the vital question: what is the place of China, India and Southeast Asia in the Asian order? It specifically asks about the possibility of a Sino-centric regional order, akin to the tributary system that existed prior to the arrival of European colonial powers, or whether China's own version of the Monroe Doctrine is already active in Asian order in general, and South-East Asia in particular. Acharya rejects both propositions. Neither a Sino-centric order nor a Chinese version of Monroe doctrine is considered as a future possibility as these will be vigorously resisted by not only ASEAN countries but also by the US, Japan and India, who are all significant stakeholders in the Asian order.

Comparing and contrasting the rise of India and China, the book contends that:

while China may have more comprehensive power generally and in Southeast Asia more specifically, India has a potential for exercising influence over Southeast Asia. To much greater extent than China's, India's rise is cheered, not feared by Southeast Asians and the international community. While the growth of Indian military power is more limited than China's, the latter's geopolitical role is a mixed blessing at best, depending on how much restraint it chooses to exercise, especially towards its Southeast Asian neighbours (p. xxii).

In summary, the book not only spotlights the historic encounters between India and China but also deliberates on their role as a major geopolitical order in the twenty-first century. Insofar as the Asian order is concerned, Acharya considers both competition and convergences between India and China, in economic, geopolitical and strategic arena, a defining feature of their interaction in Southeast Asia, which will shape the regional order. Even though ASEAN and its institutional approach towards evolving an enduring regional order has been considered far from perfect, the book contends that China and India can learn from Southeast Asia. Instead of viewing it as natural backyard for geopolitical competition, it recommends that both should adopt ASEAN's approach of mutual restraint and accommodation through regional cooperation

and legitimisation. Without such restraint, their global aspirations will be seriously constrained.

INDIA TURNS EAST: INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT AND US–CHINA RIVALRY

While Acharya locates India's Look East policy as a significant event of contemporary times in the broad continuum of India's civilisational and historical interactions with Southeast Asia, Grare's book is a more focused assessment of economic and strategic objectives of the Look East policy in the extant regional geopolitical environment. It argues that India's domestic economic liberalisation has buttressed the envisaged economic objective of regional engagement through the Look East policy. The strategic dimension of the policy has progressively emerged through the convergence of interests with regional countries and the US as a response to the potential threat of rising China. Beyond economic dimension, India's determination to recover its status as a leading Asian power and the desire to preserve its strategic autonomy have been considered as the key drivers of India's Look East policy.

It has been argued that in the cumulative development of its economic, political and strategic dimensions, the Look East policy has become India's favourite instrument to prevent the emergence of a China-led regional order. With the intensification of the US–China rivalry, India's Look East policy has found congruence and complementarity with the US strategic approach towards Asia. There exists an expectation that India will, someday, be an essential partner in the US' balancing effort vis-à-vis China. With this premise, the book attempts to explore future relevance of the Look East policy in the context of a rapidly changing regional strategic milieu through some critical questions:

1. Has the Look East policy been—and is it likely to be even more so in the future—an effective instrument to address India's concern vis-à-vis China?
2. How deep is the congruence between India's and the US' objectives? How real is the complementarity between India's Look East policy and the US 'rebalance towards Asia'?
3. How is the 'rebalance towards Asia' likely to influence the Look East policy in the future and how is likely to affect India–US relations?

While exploring the influence of Sino-Indian dynamics as a

determinant of India's Look East policy, the book explores the evolution of Sino-Indian bilateral relations taking into account territorial disputes, Tibet, and the rivalry for predominance in Asia as well as the way these determinants have shaped the interaction of the two countries with broader regional communities. It has been argued that while India's regional engagement in Asia cannot be entirely explained as a merely an effort to balance China, the latter's growing economic, political and military role in Asia and beyond has been an important motivator.

The analysis of the growing convergence of interest between India and the US and its impact on India's policy provides an overview of evolutionary trends in India-US relations since the end of the Cold War. India's economic reform in the 1990s and its growing political profile heralded a new era of rapprochement between the two countries who had remained 'estranged democracies' during the Cold War. Rather than acting as an obstacle to the bilateral engagement, the transient tumult caused by the nuclear tests of 1998 accelerated the transformation of India's relation with the US and other major powers. However, the book argues that the asymmetry of powers and interests between India and the US creates significant divergences between the two countries and highlights both the convergences and differences between their respective objectives. While there exists convergence between Washington and New Delhi on most major regional issues, which include simmering tensions in the South China Sea and the regional security architecture, there are also significant differences between the policies of the two countries in Asia-Pacific, ranging from economic and trade issues to uncertainty about the US involvement in Asia. India's tepid response to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) has been discussed at length as a major divergence, along with India's concept of strategic autonomy. Grare points that these bilateral trends underpin a complex situation in which mistrust in India and frustration in the US co-exists with sustained progress in the relationship.

The second part of the book takes a closer look at India's strategic engagement in Southeast Asia, as well as its attempt to fill up the strategic space in Asia in the post-Cold War milieu due to the progressive withdrawal of the US and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). It argues that 'perceptions of India's potential strategic role in the Southeast Asia changed dramatically during the 1990s partly as a result of its own outreach efforts but more as consequence of the growing regional concern generated by the China's rise' (p. 72). Although India's

defence cooperation with Southeast Asia began as a reaction to post-Cold War imperatives, it has progressively improved since the early 1990s due to a convergence of strategic interests with ASEAN. India is now considered as part of the Southeast Asia strategic landscape not only because of the necessity and value of defence cooperation but also on the broad principles of security cooperation in the ASEAN framework. India's engagement with Myanmar is considered central for both India's endeavour for greater connectivity with Southeast Asia and to diminish or contain China's influence in Myanmar. Notwithstanding the relative success of India's engagement with Myanmar, India has been considered as a niche but minor player. The book contends that a balance of India and China's respective influence will evolve slowly and will be partly dependent on the policies of other actors, including the US and Japan (p. 112).

Moving beyond Southeast Asia, India's engagement with Australia and Japan has been closely examined in the third part titled 'Pacific Ambivalence'. It points towards apparent contradictions in India's engagement with its Pacific partners, Australia and Japan, with regard to China. India and Australia bilateral engagement has been termed as paradoxical strategic relationship due to structural obstacles and persistence of a deep ambivalence on both sides. A common concern regarding Chinese assertiveness and growing trade between countries will not result in a common strategic framework. While India remains sceptical about Australia's reliability as a strategic partner, Australia wishes to avoid being placed in a situation that would imply stark choices between Beijing and New Delhi. It has been opined that the dilemma that affects the relationship between India and Australia will persist until both countries strengthen their capacities and/or the need for strong and immediate partnership is forced upon them by some unforeseen event of a strategic nature (p. 135).

The analysis of India–Japan relations charts the evolution of their relations and examines the possibilities and limitations of their partnership. Security concerns about China are central to this relationship. China's assertiveness in the East China Sea and on the Sino-Indian border has prompted both countries to go beyond their traditional relations, and this has led to a convergence of strategic interests between the two countries. However, like in the case of India–Australia relations, India and Japan's common concern vis-à-vis China is at once a product of political proximity and of strategic ambiguity. Maritime security cooperation is a

real potential area of strategic cooperation between India and Japan due to their geographical complementarity, where both can provide security assurance to each other in their respective areas of influence. The book argues that, despite their common strategic concerns about China, military cooperation between India and Japan is likely to remain limited in the foreseeable future. The Japanese defence industry remains sceptical about investment opportunities in India's defence manufacturing due to the tortuously slow procurement process illustrated by vexed negotiations in the procurement of Japanese amphibious aircraft US-2 since 2011. Paradoxically, the initial hesitation of the Japanese private sector has become the main reason for the Japanese government's involvement in infrastructure building in India. This involvement aims to transform the investment landscape in India and make it a regional manufacturing and export hub. This, in turn, could impact India's relative economic importance in Asia and beyond, and increase its political influence. In that sense, India's relationship with Japan illustrates the potential of the Look East policy in its most ambitious dimensions; at the same time, it also reveals the real ambivalence which characterises the relationship via the gap between expectations and the reality of their implementation.

The fourth part of the book looks at how India's strategies for economic and institutional integration have affected, both negatively and positively, its standing in Asia and highlights some of the challenges to its current position. A comparative perspective of India's and China's economic standing analyses the parallel development of India's economic diplomacy in Asia and examines the constraints the former faces in the development of its economic influence. It has been argued that despite the power differential between India and China, the size and potential of the Indian economy still make it an attractive economic partner for a number of Asian countries, which is one of the reasons behind the success of the Look East policy. At the same time, actual economic dynamics challenge the idea that India may be capable of fulfilling the role of a balancer to China, that some of India's partners expect it to play (p. 160). While India's participation in Asian regionalism—as seen through its inclusion in the various regional forums—is considered remarkably effective, so far its regional activism has been rather passive. The book maintains that India will be able to prevent the emergence of a China-led regionalism only if it is able to play a more important and active role in the emerging regional institutions, which requires not only deep reforms of its economy but also more proactive diplomacy (p. 197).

The concluding chapter looks at the future of India–US relations in the changing dynamics of Asia-Pacific regional order. Both the Look East policy and the US ‘Rebalance to Asia’ contain elements of balancing and containment, but also of engagement with China, which points towards strategic policy convergences. However, there persist significant differences between the two countries due to their asymmetry of power, their respective vulnerability vis-à-vis China and divergences of opinion regarding the role of China in the international system. It opines that India is more vulnerable than its American partner and tries, therefore, to limit any real or potential antagonism with China, but also tries to obtain security guarantees from Washington while preserving its strategic autonomy. This has led to occasional frustration on both the sides and raises questions about the actual complementarity of India’s Look East policy and its usefulness for American policy. India’s lack of consensus about the future course of the US–India relations has been highlighted through competing views about the strategic necessity of closer politico-military relations with Washington on the one hand, and deep scepticism of the US intentions and apprehension of becoming a pawn in the US hand on the other. The real challenge for India will be a re-definition of the concept of strategic autonomy that allows it to leverage American capabilities while avoiding being drawn into a zero-sum game between the US and China. Exploring some way out of India’s strategic dilemma, Grare recommends that India should capitalise on the unprecedented goodwill it is receiving from the US and others by speeding up its reforms process, which will be the main determinant of the future of the US–India relations. Cautioning against short-term expectations from the US, he argues that the future of the US–India relationship is contingent on the slow but steady development of cooperation at a pace comfortable to India.

An overall excellent research and holistic examination of India’s Look East policy in the book has been marred by few editorial oversights. In its examination of the military dimensions of India’s Look East policy, it has been pointed out that negative perception about India’s rising military capability in the 1980s disappeared due to India’s reduced defence expenditure as a result of a fund crunch, as a consequence of which India’s naval doctrine shifted from ‘sea control’ to ‘sea denial’ and a plan was put in place for gradual reduction of India’s fleet (p. 12). The cited reference to this crucial assertion is incomplete (p. 220). It is pertinent to highlight here that despite a financial crunch, there was no such plan

to downsize the Indian Navy's fleet or the occurrence of a doctrinal shift in its strategic thought. The following quote highlights the implications of the financial crunch in the 1980s and contradicts Grare's view on the issue:

The failure of the monsoon in 1986 led to the drought of 1987 and financial stringency until 1990. The financial crisis of 1991 prolonged the period of austere naval budgets. Fortunately, Naval Headquarters' systematic and swift staff work in 1985 and 1986 had obtained sanctions for all naval projects and it was possible to keep these projects moving albeit at a slower pace until the economy started recovering from 1994 onwards.

Despite being accorded lesser priority than the Army and the Air Force in the allocation of resources, the Navy was not only able to stay abreast of other navies in naval propulsion, weapon, sensor and computer technology, but also to achieve a respectable measure of self-reliance.¹

Similarly, while narrating India's overture for regional leadership in the post-colonial period and its turning away from the region post-1962, Grare highlights that 'in 1967, India declined to join ASEAN, which it saw as a Western organization and a substitute for Southeast Asia Treaty Organization' (p. 73). While India's opposition to security organisations led by external powers is well documented, its disinclination to join ASEAN may not be an entirely accurate assessment. On this issue, Acharya's book has a completely different take which contends that 'the ASEAN, formed in 1967, did not invite India to join the group—a far cry from the Bandung era when India was a co-convenor of the Bandung conference' (p. xiv). He has further argued that the perceived rivalry between India and China might have put off the smaller and weaker Asian nation to join either or both in forming a regional association (p. 121). It is pertinent to point out that during his visit to Malaysia and Singapore in May 1967, Indian Foreign Minister Chagla had indeed said:

We will be very happy to have bilateral arrangements with Singapore, with regard to trade, commerce, and economic co-operation. But if Singapore chooses to join any regional cooperation, we will be happy to join such a grouping, if other members want India to do so. If others want to have a small grouping, India will be very happy to remain outside and help such a grouping—India does not want to dominate any regional grouping.²

CONCLUSION

The evolution of Sino-Indian relations points to a paradox: repeated attempts by the two nations to develop good neighbourly relations is offset by their relentless drift towards political rivalry. As of today, the trajectory of the India–China relationship remains as complex as ever and is difficult to decipher. The two books reviewed above have attempted to contextualise key aspects of Sino-Indian bilateral dynamics and its implications for the wider Asia-Pacific region.

Both books surmise that from the early 1990s, when India launched its Look East policy, its relationship with the wider Asia-Pacific has come a long way. While it continues to see ASEAN as the core of East Asia, India's interests have broadened to include Asia-Pacific as a whole. Although India's economic ties in the region are unlikely to ever become comparable to those of neighbouring China, India's impressive economic growth has created a sound basis for its relations with the Asia-Pacific. With its emphasis on pragmatic cooperation rather than ideological posturing and its cooperative security strategy, India is a potentially valuable security partner in the region. However, the present level of strategic engagement remains far below the desired expectations of potential partners even after taking into account the transformation of the 'Look East' policy to a more proactive 'Act East' policy. Both authors consider India a key player in shaping the geopolitical future of the region and have highlighted recommendations worth consideration by Indian policymakers and strategic thinkers.

NOTES

1. G.M. Hiranandani, *Transition to Guardianship: The Indian Navy 1991–2000*, New Delhi: Lancer Publishers & Distributors, 2009, p. 24, available at <https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/sites/default/files/Transition-to-Guardianship-07Apr16.pdf>, accessed on 24 December 2017.
2. K.P. Saksena, *Cooperation in Development: Problems and Prospects for India and ASEAN*, New Delhi and Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1986, p. 53.