

Southeast Asia-India Defence Relations in the Changing Regional Security Landscape

India-Southeast Asian relations, though longstanding historically, have only begun to blossom in the last decade or so. This is most discernible in the area of defence. Beginning with low-level intermittent bilateral exchanges in the 1970s and 1980s, since India's 'Look East Policy' in the early 1990s, this has now developed and matured rapidly on multiple fronts, both bilaterally and multilaterally. India's membership in the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus Eight in 2010 was an explicit recognition by Southeast Asian states of the rising importance of India as an indispensable and durable player in the new regional security architecture. While debates continue about the motivations behind India and Southeast Asian states' reasons to enhance their defence ties, what is even more pertinent is the implications of this defence tie-up, especially against the backdrop of the weakening of American military presence and the growing assertiveness of the Chinese. What is the nature of Southeast Asia-India defence relations, the reasons for the growth in ties and more important, the consequences of the defence relations, will be analyzed in this study.

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Bilveer Singh



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Abbreviations

ADMM	ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting
ADMM + 8	ASEAN Defence Minister's Meeting Plus Eight
AJAI	<i>Al-Jemaah Al-Islamiyyah</i>
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
DCA	Defence Cooperation Agreement
DPD	Defence Policy Dialogue
EAS	East Asia Summit
HADR	Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief
IAF	Indian Air Force
IN	Indian Navy
IONS	Indian Ocean Naval Symposium
ITEC	Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation
JWG	Joint Working Group
LEP	Look East Policy
LeT	<i>Lashkar-e-Toiba</i>
LIMA	Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace Exhibition
MIDCOM	Malaysia-India Defence Committee

MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
ReCAAP	Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships in Asia
RSAF	Republic of Singapore Air Force
RSN	Republic of Singapore Navy
SCMC	Sub-Committee for Military Cooperation
SIMBEX	Singapore-India Maritime Bilateral Exercise
SLOCs	Sea Lines of Communications
TAC	Treaty of Amity and Cooperation
WPNS	Western Pacific Naval Symposium

Introduction

Historically and culturally, India has ever been an intrinsic part of Southeast Asia and its footprint is clearly visible even today.* However, following the colonisation and subsequent decolonisation of Southeast Asia the destinies of the two regions diverged, leading in effect to the creation of two distinct geopolitical regions, especially during the later period of the Cold War. Various developments at the national, regional and global level have, however, helped to propel South and Southeast Asia closer together, especially as far as Southeast Asia - India are concerned.

While much work has been done on defence developments in Southeast Asia and India, there is a dearth of literature on defence cooperation between the two entities — which is surprising, considering the heightened defence cooperation between the two in the last two decades or so.¹ To that extent, Southeast Asia-India defence cooperation is essentially a post-Cold War phenomenon. When, why and what is the significance of the Southeast Asia-India defence cooperation is the focus of this study. However, first, it will be useful to contextualise relations between Southeast Asia and India by examining the current status of defence ties between the two.

* I wish to convey my sincere thanks and appreciation to Dr Sinderpal Singh from the Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore, for providing useful comments on my earlier draft of the paper.

¹ For example, Auguste Rai, *The Jewel in the Crown? India's Defence Relations with Singapore*. Honours Thesis Submitted to the Department of Political Science, National University of Singapore, 2009/2010; Subhash Kapila, "India-Vietnam Strategic Partnership: The Convergence of Interests," *South Asia Analysis Group: Paper no. 177*, January 2, 2001 at <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/%5Cpapers2%5Cpaper177.htm>; Allatif Mohamed Noor, "India-Malaysia Strategic Dialogue 2007," *Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies*, April 18, 2007 at <http://ipcs.org/seminar/india/india-malaysia-strategic-dialogue-693.html>.



Southeast Asia's Rising Engagement of India

Relations between Southeast Asian states and India are of long standing. In many ways, history and geography have condemned both to physical proximity even though their political and economic differences kept them at arms length. Not only does India share a land border with Myanmar, it is only 43 kilometres away from its Coco Island, India's Great Nicobar Island is only 163 kilometres away from Indonesia's island of Sumatra, India is 450 kilometres from Thailand and 700 kilometres away from Malaysia. Like China, there is also a huge Indian diaspora in Southeast Asia with the Indian social-cultural footprint strongly embedded in almost every Southeast Asian state due to the historical Indianisation of the region since 200 BC.²

Southeast Asian states' engagement with India is best epitomised by the manner in which its ties developed with one particular state, namely, Singapore. While other countries in the region such as Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia and the Philippines had developed diplomatic ties with New Delhi much earlier, Singapore only established formal ties with India in 1965 when it gained independence following its separation from Malaysia. In its initial years of independence, Singapore was beset with problems of insecurity both from within and without. While inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflicts were managed by taking tough internal security measures, India figured greatly in Singapore's thinking in terms of managing regional and extra-regional security concerns. Viewing its immediate neighbours,

² See Yoginder Mohan Bammi, *India and South East Asia: The Security Cooperation* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2006); Also see, Coedes, George, *The Indianised States of Southeast Asia*. Edited by Walter F. Vella. Translated by Susan Brown. University of Malaysia Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1968.

Malaysia and Indonesia as potential threats, the Singapore leadership envisioned India as playing a major role in its security and foreign policy. Strategically, Singapore saw India as a counterweight to Malaysia and Indonesia, deterring or at least complicating attempts by these states to infringe on Singapore's sovereignty. Singapore also wanted India to provide diplomatic support to enable it to widen its international space, by its entry into international organisations.³ Militarily, Singapore also wanted India to train its fledging armed forces.⁴ Despite the high hopes of the Singapore leadership, India was preoccupied with China and Pakistan, leaving it with little time and resources for engaging with Southeast Asian countries. Worse still, New Delhi's close ties with Moscow alienated most of the non-communist Southeast Asian states such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Philippines who were the initial members of ASEAN. Hence, benign neglect largely characterised India's relations with Southeast Asia in the initial period. This only changed with the ending of the Cold War, when the Southeast Asian states witnessed an all-round blossoming of ties with India.

Similarly since the mid-1950s, India supported the struggle of Indochinese countries against the United States and its Cold War allies. Vietnam's close relations with India can be traced to this period, when India supported Hanoi in various international

³ As a leading member of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), India's diplomatic support for Singapore would have enhanced Singapore's image as a non-aligned Afro-Asian state. This would have also reduced suspicions of the communist bloc and Afro-Asian states over Singapore's hosting of British military facilities, and make them more willing to recognise Singapore post independence. See Chan Heng Chee, *Singapore: The Politics of Survival 1965-1967*, Oxford University Press, Singapore, 1971.

⁴ This was due to two reasons. First was the long military experience of the Indian armed forces. Secondly, Britain was reluctant to provide military training for fear of damaging its relations with Malaysia. The then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew noted that the British "made no offer" to help Singapore build an army, as it "had to deal with a Malaysia more than a little unhappy with them" over Britain's role in securing favourable treatment for Singapore during its existence as part of Malaysia. See Lee, Kuan Yew *From Third World to First*, Marshall Cavendish Editions, Singapore, 2000, p.29.

forums even at the cost of embittering Sino-US relations . It was mainly because of this that in Southeast Asia, Vietnam emerged as a state with the greatest convergence of strategic interests with India. Thus, while India has for the longest time neglected the region, the turn of the millennium presented a complex strategic environment that made Vietnam an obvious defence partner with the China factor looming large in both countries' security calculus.⁵

In recent history, Indonesia's relations with India have been marked by highs and lows with relations improving markedly since the early 1990s. India was one of Indonesia's major supporters and hosted various international conferences to pressurise the Dutch to decolonise Indonesia during Indonesia's war of independence, and especially the Hague's efforts to recolonise Indonesia. President Sukarno and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, both played a critical role in organising the Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung, Indonesia in April 1955, which later evolved into the Non-Aligned Movement. However, by the early 1960s, bilateral ties were strained, with relations reaching their lowest ebb when Indonesia supported Pakistan in the 1965 India-Pakistan War. Following Sukarno's fall, Jakarta maintained its distance with New Delhi because of India's close ties with socialist countries, especially the USSR. The rise of China in the 1980s and 1990s created a common ground between Jakarta and New Delhi, and bilateral relations have soared ever since, especially when India formulated its Look East Policy to establish close ties with Southeast Asia.

Malaysia developed cordial ties with India in the 1950s and the 1960s - best epitomised by New Delhi's support for Malaysia against Indonesia's *Konfrontasi* (*Confrontation*) and Malaysia's

⁵ For an analysis of the China factor in Vietnam's and India's security calculations, see Subhash Kapila, "India-Vietnam Strategic Partnership: The Convergence of Interests," South Asia Analysis Group Paper No. 177, January 2, 2001 at <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/%5Cpapers2%5Cpaper177.htm> (Accessed March 16, 2010).

support for India during China's attack on India in 1962. Philippines' diplomatic relations with India started in November 1949. However, throughout the Cold War period, relations can best be described as being of 'cordial distance' due mainly to Manila's alliance with the United States. Bilateral ties have improved markedly since then, including increasing defence cooperation between the two countries. The same can be said of Thai-India relations.

In many ways, Myanmar's relations with India mirrored those of other Southeast Asian states with the country. Myanmar was always special for India's leaders as it was historically a province of India during the British Raj. Additionally, there have been close socio-cultural ties and more importantly, both countries share a 1,600 kilometres long but troublesome land border as well as maritime boundaries. While Indian leaders vigorously supported Burmese independence struggle and the initial flourishing of democracy, relations between the two countries suffered since the military took over power in 1962. In addition to the repressive policies of the military junta, the expulsion of the Indian community and the close ties of the junta with China accounted for the increasing distance between the two neighbours. It was only after the launch of India's Look East Policy that ties between the two countries improved with Indian prime ministers, like Narasimha Rao, Atal Behari Vajpayee and Manmohan Singh visiting Yangon, partly to neutralise and draw Myanmar away from China's influence.

Key Imperatives in the Rise of Southeast Asia-India Relations

Located in what was traditionally a conflict and strategic region, the defence policies of most Southeast Asian states, especially vulnerable ones such as Singapore, have always premised on the “maintenance of a sub-regional balance of power in maritime Southeast Asia”.⁶ This was accomplished by the building up of a deterrent defence capability by the respective armed forces and by engaging extra-regional powers in political, security and economic cooperation. The focus of the policy was on enhancing their interdependence with great powers, thereby giving them important tangible stakes in the region’s security and survival. A good case in this regard was the defence policy of Singapore.⁷ This policy has been consistently reiterated by its political elites. For example, in a speech in parliament in March 2006, the defence minister, Teo Chee Hean argued:

the fundamentals of Singapore’s defence policy are determined by our geography and environment. We are a small island with no strategic depth. We have no hinterland to absorb an attack, and there is no natural buffer between the external environment and our populated areas and economic infrastructure. We are also a maritime nation, critically dependent on the security of sea lines of communications and the freedom of navigation. Our geography – both in the contours and size of our island and in our location in a sometimes turbulent region – is immutable.⁸

⁶ Tim Huxley, *Defending the Lion City: The Armed Forces of Singapore*, Allen & Unwin, Australia, 2000, p.55.

⁷ See Bilveer Singh, *The Vulnerability of Small States Revisited: A Study of Singapore’s Post-Cold War Foreign Policy*, Gadjah Mada University Press, Jogjakarta, 1999, pp.274-302.

⁸ See “Speech by Minister of Defence Teo Chee Hean at Committee of Supply Debate 2006” at http://www.nexus.gov.sg/inmindef/news_and_events/nr/2006/mar/06mar06_nr.html

As a result, the twin pillars of defence and diplomacy have underpinned Singapore's defence policy. According to Teo Chee Hean:

We have invested considerable resources into building up a defence force that can deter aggression. And should deterrence fail, the Singapore Armed Forces must be able to defeat the aggressor swiftly and decisively. At the same time, we have also been enhancing our security by pursuing active defence diplomacy. The objectives of our defence diplomacy are to develop positive and mutually beneficial relationships with friendly countries and armed forces, to contribute to a stable and cooperative regional environment and international order.⁹

However, due to the massive diversities obtaining in the region, states such as Malaysia and Indonesia in maritime Southeast Asia preferred to distance themselves from the great powers. This was most vividly evident in Indonesia's case, which, as the largest state in the region and in order to exercise power in the neighbourhood, opted for what came to be described as a 'free and active foreign policy', requiring distance from great powers, rejection of foreign military bases in the region and being opposed to any form of entangling alliances with great powers. This divergence, with Singapore favouring foreign military and great powers' presence and Indonesia opposing it, has greatly influenced the dynamics of Southeast Asia's external relations, within which, countries such as India had to operate. It also partly explains the very fast growing intimate relations between Singapore and India, because of the broad convergences in terms of geopolitical and geo-strategic outlooks.

India's defence policy, meanwhile, had traditionally focussed on preparing for a war with Pakistan and China, and managing internal security threats such as terrorism and insurgencies, mainly from Pakistan-based militant organisations.¹⁰ Since the late 1980s,

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ See Ministry of Defence, *Annual Report 2002-2003*, Government of India, 2003, p.2.

however, India's naval and air power build up in the Andaman and Nicobar island bases indicated New Delhi's interest in securing the sea lines of communications (SLOCS) in the Indian Ocean and Arabian Gulf. This interest has grown with India's trade with East and Southeast Asia, especially following the implementation of its 'Look East Policy' in 1992.

Between the early 1970s and 1990s, Southeast Asia-India relations were characterised by mutual suspicions and distance with the non-socialist states, with India preferring to maintain close ties with the Indochinese states. For instance, Singapore opposed India's recognition of the Vietnamese-installed Heng Samrin regime in Cambodia as the republic viewed the 1978 Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia as an attempt to expand communist influence in Southeast Asia. India's support for Vietnam and the USSR was regarded as a threat to Southeast Asian security. India, on the other hand, perceived its support for Vietnam as an important counter to any US-China-Pakistan alliance against India. This perception was further reinforced by President Nixon's visit to China in 1971 and China's provision of military supplies for Pakistan. Difference between Singapore and India did not immediately dissipate after Vietnam's withdrawal from Cambodia in 1990. Following the withdrawal of American forces from the Philippines in 1991, ASEAN member-states such as Singapore feared that the American disengagement from Southeast Asia could lead to "competition between India, China and Japan to fill the [political vacuum]" in the region.¹¹ In contrast, India was concerned with potential American domination of Southeast Asia, leading it to oppose Singapore's decision to offer facilities for American troops following their expulsion from the Philippines.¹² The Southeast Asia-India rapprochement - which included the non-socialist states - in the arena of security, despite

¹¹ Kripa Sridharan, "The Evolution and Growth of India-Singapore Relations", in Yong Mun Cheong and V.V. Bhanaji Rao (eds.) *Singapore-India Relations : A Primer*, Singapore University Press, Singapore, 1995, p.32.

¹² Ibid.

earlier apprehensions, can be attributed to two main factors. First, China had made considerable efforts since the early 1970s to enhance its political and economic influence in Southeast Asia, establishing diplomatic ties with almost all Southeast Asian states, including building close ties with the internationally isolated state of Myanmar. From India's perspective, Beijing's actions could potentially isolate India diplomatically and strategically from the region. This was especially true with regard to the burgeoning Beijing-Yangon relationship, with the former believed to have built four electronic listening posts on Myanmar territory to monitor India naval movements and signals in the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea. China's upgrading of the Myanmar's port of Hangyi could also potentially provide the former with a capability to project power into the Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean.¹³ Thus, while China's defence ties with Southeast Asian countries are highly underdeveloped, mainly due to multiple allergies in the region to developing ties with Beijing; as part of Southeast Asia's new warmth towards India, defence relationships have seen a great leap forward, not just compared to China but also compared to the past.

By engaging Southeast Asian states such as Singapore through dialogue and defence exercises, India also hoped to reduce suspicions regarding its naval build up, check Chinese influence in the region and complement its economic ties with the region through its 'Look East Policy', first declared in Singapore during Prime Minister Narasimha Rao's official visit in 1992. From the perspective of Singapore and other Southeast Asian states, security ties with India would give New Delhi a stake in regional stability and counter-balance the rising China influence and power. A mutual interest in maintaining a balance of power in the region provided both Southeast Asian states and India with the incentive to cooperate in security and defence-related areas. It was mainly

¹³ See Prasun K. Sengupta, "An Impending Clash of Civilisation in Asia", *Asian Defence Yearbook 2000-2001*, Syed Hussein Publications Sdn. Bhd., Kuala Lumpur, 2000, p.37; and "India: Country and Armed Forces Profiles", *Asian Defence Yearbook 2000-2001*, p. 51.

due to this that Singapore championed, with support of other ASEAN member-states, India's inclusion in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in 1996, the same year that India also became ASEAN's Dialogue Partner.

At the same time, India became increasingly pro-active in Southeast Asia, by strengthening its defence ties with countries in the region. In April 2004, India unveiled its new maritime doctrine. According to this doctrine, India's maritime areas extended from "the arc of the Persian Gulf to the Straits of Malacca, even though this did not entail the exclusion of other great powers from the region."¹⁴ The document released by India's navy chief, identified four key roles for the Indian navy in supporting New Delhi's foreign and defence policies. First, the military function emphasised the development of the capability to project force and the building of trust and inter-operability with foreign navies. Second, the navy's diplomatic function was to enhance India's relations with its neighbours and with countries of strategic importance in the Indian Ocean region, including Southeast Asian states such as Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and Myanmar. Third, the navy's constabulary function was to cooperate with the coast guard to maintain stability in the Indian Ocean region with the aim of reducing disruption of maritime commerce and energy supplies between the Middle East and East Asia. Finally, the doctrine emphasised the navy's humanitarian role, which included search and rescue missions and assistance during calamities such as floods, tsunamis and earthquakes.

At the fifth Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore in 2006, India's minister of defence, Pranab Mukherjee, enumerated India's defence policy as follows: to safeguard India's territorial integrity and sovereignty; promote durable peace in the immediate neighbourhood, including the Indian Ocean region and to

¹⁴ See Reshmi Kazi, "India's Naval Aspirations", Article No. 1472, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, August 23, 2004. This was further revised in August 2008.

promote economic and social development. India hoped to become a key strategic player in Asia by virtue of its strong economy.¹⁵ First, it sought to enhance its existing political, economic and security ties with states in the Middle East and South, Southeast, Northeast and Central Asia. This would enable India to increase its diplomatic influence and reduce tensions between China and India, allowing scarce resources to be channelled into developing India's economic and technological capabilities. Second, India sought to increase its strategic influence over key and strategic maritime and energy routes passing through the Indian Ocean, Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal and the Strait of Malacca. Its role and importance in the energy supply chain, would lead to a concomitant rise in India's influence on the world stage especially as energy security is now key to global politics. India also hopes to use its influence to prevent any disruption in supplies of energy and raw materials that are vitally needed to drive its economy, to counter attempts by potential rivals to project power against India by gaining footholds in India's immediate neighbourhood and to give India leverage over global economic development, which would in turn enhance India's political, economic and strategic clout. It is against this backdrop that the growing defence relations between India and the ASEAN member states should be appreciated and understood.

¹⁵ See Address by Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, Defence Minister of India at the Fifth IISS Asia Security Summit on June 3, 2006, (Shangri-la Dialogue), Singapore, June 2-4, 2006.

Southeast Asia-Indian Defence Relations

Unlike the United States or Australia, India has not had comprehensive defence ties with the ASEAN member countries.¹⁶ India's obsession with Pakistan and China from the 1950s to 1980s meant that East and Southeast Asia were off New Delhi's strategic radar. It was only in the post-Cold War era, especially following the attack on the US on September 11, 2001, that India began to develop closer defence ties with Southeast Asian countries. The single most important trigger for this was the formulation of India's 'Look East Policy' by Prime Minister Rao in 1992 which has since been followed by subsequent prime ministers like Atal Behari Vajpayee and Manmohan Singh. With the changes in strategic architecture, no clear competing political alliances, economic liberalisation and emergence of economic blocs, New Delhi saw East and Southeast Asia not just as potential markets but also as sources of investments and gateways to other lucrative regions of the world. In its initial stages, India's Look East Policy was more focussed on Southeast Asia and on forging closer political, economic and social-cultural ties. Southeast Asia-India defence relations also witnessed a quantum leap not only in India's defence cooperation with individual ASEAN member states but also at multilateral levels.¹⁷ Southeast Asia-Indian defence relationship can be understood at two levels. First, the bilateral defence ties between individual Southeast Asia states and India. Second, the multilateral collaboration between ASEAN as a

¹⁶ See Anna Louise Strachan, Harnit Kaur Kang and Tuli Sinha, "Interview with Amb. Rajiv Sikri, India's Look East Policy: A Critical Assessment", *Special Report*, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, October 2009, pp. 1-10.

¹⁷ See G.V.C. Naidu, "Whither the Look East Policy : India and Southeast Asia", *Strategic Analysis*, 28 (2), April-June 2004.

regional bloc with India as well as involvement of ASEAN member-states in various defence activities that are largely multilateral in character.

Bilateral Defence Relations

Vietnam-Indian Relations

Historically, India has had longstanding defence ties with Vietnam, partly due to strategic and political convergences during the Cold War. In addition to exchanges of defence officials, Vietnamese military officers have been receiving training at Indian defence colleges for a long time. India has also helped to refurbish Vietnam's Soviet-era air force and navy. This intensified in the post-Cold War era in the context of India's 'Look East' policy and Vietnam and India signed a defence cooperation agreement in 1994 but there was little follow-up.¹⁸ While India described the protocol as a low-key framework agreement, the Vietnamese defence attaché in Delhi was quoted as saying that Vietnam needed Indian assistance quite desperately, both in training and hardware procurement.¹⁹ While Vietnam's eagerness to engage India in a security role continued throughout the 1990s, the major upswing in defence relations between the two states came in 2000 when the Indian defence minister George Fernandes signed a new defence protocol which was more comprehensive and included an institutionalised framework for regular discussions between the two defence ministers, naval exercises between the two navies and coast guards, and training of Vietnamese air force pilots by the Indians.²⁰

¹⁸ Subash Kapila, "India-Vietnam Strategic Partnership: The Convergence of Interests", South Asia Analysis Group, Paper No. 177, January 2, 2001.

¹⁹ Carlyle A. Thayer, "Vietnam's Defence Policy and its Impact on Foreign Relations," *Scribd.*, June 6-8, 2008 at <http://www.scribd.com/doc/17420791/Thayer-Vietnam-Defence-and-Foreign-Policy-2008> (Accessed March 16, 2010).

²⁰ "India-Vietnam Defence Pact: A Strategic Gain for New Delhi," *India News Online*, April 10, 2000 at <http://news.indiamart.com/news-analysis/india-vietnam-defenc-7062.html> (Accessed March 16, 2010).

Since March 2000, a high-level security dialogue has been in place to discuss among other issues, piracy on the high seas. In May 2000, Vietnam and India signed a joint declaration on the Framework of Comprehensive Cooperation, which signalled another milestone in the relationship. Vietnam has also allowed Indian officers to train in its jungle warfare school since 2000. India's concerns over the challenges posed by terrorism meant that both countries had a vested interest in developing their asymmetric warfare capabilities in which Vietnam has had a long history of success. In July 2007, a new level of security cooperation was reached when the visiting Vietnamese prime minister Nguyen Tan Dung signed a joint declaration that "welcomed the steady development of bilateral defence and security ties" and "pledged themselves to strengthen cooperation in defence supplies, joint projects, training cooperation and intelligence exchanges".²¹ Prime Minister Nguyen described this as the launch of a 'strategic partnership' between the two countries.²² In November 2007, at the third Security Dialogue between India and Vietnam, the two states pledged to extend their security cooperation on matters of common interest and later to set up a Joint Working Group to facilitate a Memorandum of Understanding between the two states which was signed in 2008.²³ More recently, the National Assembly chairman Nguyen Phu Trong visited India in February 2010 and both states vowed to boost all round cooperation, signalling a further strengthening of ties.²⁴ While Vietnam has adopted an omni-directional policy of widening its ties with all

²¹ See C. Raja Mohan, "East Asian Security: India's Rising Profile", *RSIS Commentaries*, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore, 2007, July 30, 2007.

²² "India, Vietnam to Boost Defence, Strategic Cooperation," *India Defence*, December 17, 2007 at <http://www.india-defence.com/reports/3652> (Accessed March 18, 2010).

²³ See "India, Vietnam Sign MoU for Bilateral Cooperation on Security," *ITU Corporate Strategy Newslog*, March 27, 2008 at <http://www.itu.int/osg/csd/newslog/India+Vietnam+Sign+MoU+For+Bilateral+Cooperation+On+Security.aspx> (Accessed March 17, 2010).

²⁴ See "India, Vietnam Vow to Boost All-Round Cooperation," *VOV News*, February 25, 2010 at <http://english.vovnews.vn/Home/India-Vietnam-vow-to-boost-allround-cooperation/20102/112918.vov> (Accessed March 17, 2010).

great powers, including the United States, which saw the visit of *USS George Washington* and *USS John McCain* to Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam in August 2010, still the growth in Hanoi-New Delhi ties is significant in the context of the generally improving defence relationship between Southeast Asia and India.²⁵ Hence, following the ASEAN + 8 Defence Ministers Meeting in Hanoi in October 2010, the Indian Defence Minister, Mr Antony announced the all-round bilateral intensification of defence cooperation in all the three services, namely, Army, Navy and Air Force. In particular, the focus was on naval cooperation with the promise of increasing port calls to Vietnam and the Indian Navy's offer to help develop maintenance and repair platforms in Vietnamese ports. This was seen by analysts as India's attempt to get closer to China's naval ports as well as a response to China's increasing involvement in Indian's backyard.²⁶

Indonesia-India Relations

India's engagement with Indonesia stems from its commitment to improving bilateral relations because of India's growing security engagement with ASEAN. Besides defence cooperation, the two countries have engaged in addressing the non-traditional security challenges facing the region such as terrorism and maritime piracy. India and Indonesia signed a defence cooperation agreement in 2001.²⁷

²⁵ See Margie Mason, "US and Vietnam, once enemies, now military mates", *The Washington Times*, August 8, 2010; "USS John S. McCain arrives in Vietnam to Commemorate 15th Anniversary of Diplomatic Relations", Navy Mil., August 10, 2010 at http://www.navy.mil/search/print.asp?story_id=55216&VIRIN=&im...; Pankaj K. Jha, "Vietnam-US Strategic Partnership", IDSA Comment, Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi, August 18, 2010.

²⁶ See Rajeev Sharma, "India to Lift Vietnam Military Ties", *The Diplomat*, October 15, 2010 at <http://the-diplomat.com/indian-defence/2010/10/15/india-to-boost-vietnam-military-ties/>

²⁷ Five agreements were signed between India and Indonesia during prime minister Vajpayee's visit to Jakarta in 2001. See "Five Agreements Signed Between India and Indonesia," *Government of India*, January 11, 2001 at http://pib.nic.in/archieve/pm_visit_i/indoir4.html (Accessed March 18, 2010).

India has been supplying defence equipment, especially to the Indonesian navy. Indonesia has shown keenness to import items such as batteries for torpedoes, engines for *Parchim*-class corvettes as well as seeking repair facilities for Type 209 submarines. Both countries signed a Memorandum of Understanding on defence cooperation in 1995 which focussed on supplies, technologies, joint production and joint projects. However it is yet to be ratified by the Indonesian parliament.²⁸ During the visit of the Indonesian President, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in November 2005, the two countries agreed to hold an annual senior officer level strategic dialogue, with the first meeting to be held in the first half of 2006. A MoU on cooperation between the countries' diplomatic training institutes has also been signed. India has been providing training to Indonesian military officers under the ITEC-I programme.²⁹

In July 2004, India and Indonesia signed a Memorandum of Understanding for combating international terrorism, which provided for the formation of a Joint Working Group (JWG) on counter terrorism. The JWG held its first meeting in New Delhi in February 2005 and agreed to strengthen bilateral cooperation in combating terrorism and other transnational crimes and in maritime security through exchange of information and intelligence, capacity building and legal cooperation.³⁰ Naval cooperation has increased markedly with Indonesian and Indian navies holding joint exercises to enhance interoperability. In September 2006, the two navies conducted their first joint patrol to check piracy in the Andaman Sea. During Indian foreign minister Pranab Mukherjee's visit to Indonesia in June 2007, both

²⁸ "Security and Defence Relationship," Indonesian Embassy, March 20, 2010 at http://www.indonesianembassy.in/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=146&Itemid=136&lang=en (Accessed March 20, 2010).

²⁹ "About ITEC: A Note on Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC)" at <http://itec.nic.in/about.htm> (Accessed March 20, 2010).

³⁰ Press Trust of India, "India, Indonesia sign MoU on Combating International Terrorism," July 2, 2004.

countries affirmed the need to strengthen bilateral security cooperation.

An important area for bilateral cooperation is maritime terrorism and piracy in and around the Malacca Strait. Central to this cooperation have been the visits by Indian navies to Indonesian ports and vice-versa, joint naval exercises and escorting of Indonesian ships in the Andaman Sea. Since 1995, Indonesia, along with Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia, has been participating in ‘Milan’ the biennial gathering of navies hosted by India.³¹ India has also been conducting search and rescue operations - *Indopura SAREX* - with Indonesia. Since 1997, this bilateral SAREX has been converted into a multilateral maritime operation that includes Malaysia and Singapore as well.

While Indonesia has traditionally been opposed to foreign involvement in the Malacca Strait, they formally requested India for assistance in securing the Strait in March 2009³² and have continued coordinated naval patrols - codenamed *Ind-Indo Corpat*³³- of their shared maritime boundary. The request to India for assistance was made not only because both India and Indonesia have common maritime boundaries but also because both oppose the deployment of American naval assets in the Strait of Malacca.³⁴ In the aftermath of 2004 tsunami, India launched *Operation*

³¹ Praful Kumar Singh, “Multi-nation Exercise Milan Concludes Successfully in Andaman,” *Thaindian News*, February 8, 2010 at http://www.thaindian.com/newsportal/india-news/multi-nation-exercise-milan-concludes-successfully-in-andaman_100316958.html (Accessed February 20, 2010).

³² “Indonesia asks India to Help Maintain Malacca Straits Security”, March 5, 2009 at http://www.thaindian.com/newsportal/world-news/indonesia-asks-india-to-help-maintain-malacca-strait-security_100162932.html (Accessed on March 19, 2010).

³³ “India-Indonesia to Launch Coordinated Patrol in Indian Ocean”, October 16, 2009 at http://www.thaindian.com/newsportal/india-news/india-indonesia-to-launch-coordinated-patrol-in-indian-ocean_100261620.html (Accessed March 19, 2010).

³⁴ See “Govt opposes US deployment in Malacca Straits”, *Indabnesia.com*, April 7, 2004 at [http://blog.indahnesia.com/entry/200404070005/govt_opposes_us_d...;](http://blog.indahnesia.com/entry/200404070005/govt_opposes_us_d...) C.S. Kuppuswamy, “Straits of Malacca: Security Implications”, South Asia Analysis Group Paper No. 1033, New Delhi, June 18, 2004.

Gambhir in January 2005 and sent food and medical supplies to Indonesia through its hospital ship INS *Nirupak* and the corvette *INS Khukri*. President Yudhoyono, during his visit to India in November 2005, and the Indonesian Vice President Dr. Jusuf Kalla, during his visit in January 2007, expressed their country's gratitude for India's assistance in tsunami relief operations.³⁵

Both countries' ties received a further boost when President Bambang was honoured as the chief guest during India's Republic Day celebrations on 26 January 2011, signalling India's intent of developing special relations with Indonesia and the high value it placed on its ties with Indonesia. While the volume of trade between the two countries almost tripled from US\$4 billion in 2005 to US\$14 billion in 2010, equally important was the growing close strategic and political ties between the two giants of South and Southeast Asia, in an environment of a rising China and declining United States. During his 2011 trip, President Bambang signed trade and investments deals worth US\$15 billion as well as various agreements on extradition, counter-terrorism and closer defence ties between the two countries.³⁶ This signalled the growing consolidation of strategic and security ties between the two most important countries in southern Asia, with potential for tremendous ramifications in the Asia-Pacific region in the coming years.³⁷

Malaysia-India Relations

Since Malaysia purchased the Russian-built MiG-29 aircraft in the late 1980s, Malaysian-Indian defence interaction has intensified. India has played a key role in training Malaysian pilots and has provided logistical support for the maintenance and

³⁵ "Security and Defence Relationship," Indonesian Embassy, March 20, 2010 at http://www.indonesianembassy.in/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=146&Itemid=136&lang=en (Accessed March 20, 2010).

³⁶ Robin Bush, "Indonesia President's India Visit Highlights Partnership", February 2, 2011, *In Asia* (Asia Foundation).

³⁷ See Rajeev Sharma, "India, Indonesia Get Closer", *The Diplomat*, February 4, 2011 at <http://the-diplomat.com/indian-decade/2011/02/04/india-indonesia-get-closer>

operation of the MiG-29s and *Sukhoi* fighters ever since. India-Malaysia defence relations have steadily grown over the years from military training to include supply of defence equipment and enhanced security dialogues.³⁸ The first MoU on defence cooperation between the two countries was signed in February 1992, paving the way for widening the scope of bilateral cooperation to include joint ventures, joint development projects, procurement, logistic and maintenance support. The signing of the MoU led to the creation of the Malaysia-India Defence Committee (MIDCOM), jointly chaired by the two defence secretaries, focussing on the training of Malaysian military personnel in India. It met in February 1993, May 1997 and January 2001. In 2001, the SCMC was set up to provide fresh inputs for the MIDCOM in order to address micro-level military issues, and to generate ideas for further military cooperation. Malaysia, like Indonesia, has also benefitted from the ITEC programme organised by the Indian armed forces.³⁹

In 2004, Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi visited India and reiterated the need to engage India in defence cooperation even though a defence agreement had been signed in 1992. While the primary areas of cooperation have been in the field training exchanges, visits by armed forces officers and visits of naval ships, India has been a regular participant in the Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace (LIMA) exhibition, and Malaysia has

³⁸ Malaysian officers have been regularly attending the Defence Services Staff College (DSSC) Course, and the NDC course in India. Malaysian Armed Forces officers and men were initially trained in India but as Malaysia established its own training establishments, training in India has become more selective, and now focuses on specialised courses only. Two grandsons of Sultan Iskandar Haj, King of Johore passed out from Indian Military Academy in Dehradun. Prince Tunku Ismail Ibrahim, who concluded his attachment with 61 Cavalry in December 2007, had led the regimental contingent at the Republic Day parade on January 26, 2007. See *Defence Cooperation* at http://www.indianhighcommission.com.my/def_mal.php (Accessed March 19, 2010).

³⁹ Allatif Mohamed Noor, "India-Malaysia Strategic Dialogue 2007," Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, April 18, 2007 at <http://ipcs.org/seminar/india/india-malaysia-strategic-dialogue-693.html> (Accessed March 19, 2010).

also participated in the *Defexpo* in New Delhi. The Indian defence production network, which has become highly sophisticated in recent times, can be geared up to play a greater role in Malaysia's requirements for its defence modernisation programmes.⁴⁰ The Malaysian and Indian navies have also been conducting exercises on a regular basis. For instance, in May 2008 and June 2010, vessels from both navies conducted live-firing and anti-piracy exercises in the Malacca Strait, demonstrating their mutual interest in keeping the vital strait safe.⁴¹

In January 2008, Indian defence minister A.K. Antony, undertook a "very successful" visit to Malaysia and met with the Malaysian prime minister, deputy prime minister and foreign minister, and agreed to further expand the scope of defence cooperation. In the defence deal signed in January 2008, India was to deploy 31 air force personnel to train Malaysian air force pilots and technicians for the next two years beginning February 2008. India also offered to help Malaysia maintain its *Scorpene* submarine fleet. The Indian defence minister's visit was soon followed by visits by the army and air force chiefs in February and August of 2008 respectively.⁴² In January 2010, Malaysian prime minister Najib Tun Razak called on prime minister Manmohan Singh in New Delhi to bolster bilateral relations and witnessed the signing of numerous MoUs including an extradition treaty and enhanced defence cooperation between the two states.⁴³ And most recently,

⁴⁰ "Malaysian deputy PM arrives in India", at <http://www.irna.ir/en/news/view/line-17/0606067768175436.htm> (Accessed September 25, 2006)

⁴¹ See "India, Malaysia hold joint naval exercise", *The Times of India*, May 3, 2008; "Indian, Malaysian Navy to hold joint maritime exercise", *Brahmand.com*, June 22, 2010 at <http://www.brahmand.com/news/.../10html>

⁴² *Defence Cooperation* no. 38.

⁴³ See Indrani Bagchi, "India, Malaysia Look to Energise Ties with Najib's Visit," *Times of India*, January 19, 2010 at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/India-Malaysia-look-to-energise-ties-with-Najibs-visit/articleshow/5474281.cms> (Accessed March 19, 2010) and Rupa Damodaran, "Najib to Witness Signing of at least 13 MoUs in India," *Business Times*, January 18, 2010 at http://www.btimes.com.my/Current_News/BTIMES/articles/rupt160a/Article/ (Accessed March 19, 2010).

India and Malaysia concluded the second India-Malaysia Strategic Dialogue which was held in January 2010 in Kuala Lumpur where they agreed to bolster bilateral relations which both sides have agreed have been functioning “below optimum levels” thanks to a “large knowledge gap.”⁴⁴ During prime minister Manmohan Singh’s visit to Malaysia in October 2010, both countries agreed to enhance their cooperative security relationship including cooperation in counter-terrorism, the establishment of a JWG and the Indian defence industry’s participation in the soon-to-be established Malaysian Defence and Security Park.⁴⁵

Singapore-India

Defence relations between Singapore and India, including visits by defence officials and training at each others’ defence academies, have been going on for a long time. However, intense bilateral defence cooperation has developed only after 1993. The evolution of the relationship consists of two phases. The first phase from 1993 to 2003 had two main dimensions. First, security cooperation mainly involved exchanges between the Republic of Singapore navy [RSN] and the Indian navy [IN]. This included the *Lion King* series of naval exercises, which started in 1993. Since 1999, the exercise has been renamed Exercise SIMBEX (Singapore-India Maritime Bilateral Exercise).⁴⁶ Over the years, however, the exercise has increased in duration and complexity. The 1998 exercises lasted twelve days and involved RSN anti-submarine

⁴⁴ See Mahendra Ved, “India, Malaysia Hold Strategic Dialogue, Vow to Bridge Gap,” *Thaindian News*, February 1, 2010 at http://www.thaindian.com/newsportal/world-news/india-malaysia-hold-strategic-dialogue-vow-to-bridge-gap_100312952.html (Accessed March 19, 2010).

⁴⁵ See “India, Malaysia to enhance security cooperation”, *Zee News*, October 27, 2010 at <http://www.zeenews.com/news664150.html>.

⁴⁶ Tim Huxley, no. 6, p.220. Since 1999, “Exercise Lion King” was renamed “Exercise Simbex”. See “S’pore, Indian Navies Conduct Bilateral Exercise,” at http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/publications/cyberpioneer/news/2005/feb/24feb05_news.html (Accessed September 27, 2006)

patrol vessels for the first time.⁴⁷ These exercises, enabled the RSN to expand its access to Indian naval facilities, from Port Blair in the Andaman Islands in 1993 to India's southern naval command headquarters at Cochin, the only foreign country to do so.⁴⁸ Singapore was also allowed access to India's missile range at Chandipur, Orissa, for testing its missiles.⁴⁹ Naval cooperation was further boosted during the American invasion of Iraq. From April to September 2002, Singapore granted Indian patrol craft access to Sembawang port for escorting 24 American merchant ships through the Strait of Malacca.⁵⁰

The first phase of defence cooperation also included high-profile visits between the two countries. The RSN chief Richard Lim was the first foreign military leader to visit New Delhi's after the 1998 nuclear tests.⁵¹ The Indian defence minister George Fernandes and the Indian chief of army staff Nirmal Chander Vij also visited Singapore in 2002 and 2003 respectively. Though limited in scope, these interactions were instrumental in building confidence and enhancing trust between the two states, which had been harmed during the Cold War. The interactions laid the foundation for the development of the close defence ties during the second phase.

The second phase of Singapore-India defence relations was inaugurated in October 2003 when the defence ministers of the two countries, Teo Chee Hean and George Fernandes, signed a Defence Cooperation Agreement (DCA), establishing the exchange of intelligence and of a Defence Policy Dialogue (DPD)

⁴⁷ "Malaysia to ask India to Train pilots for Sukhoi Jets", *The Hindu*, June 11, 2006. See also "India to Train Malaysian Air Force Pilots," at *India e-News*, www.indiaenews.com/pdf/89752.pdf (Accessed March 19, 2010)

⁴⁸ G.V.C. Naidu, no. 17, p. 339.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ See David Boey, "Singapore: Reports on F-16s 'understandable'", *The Straits Times*, October 26, 2004.

⁵¹ "Singapore Navy Chief to Visit India Next Week," *The Times of India*, August 22, 1998.

between the defence ministries. The DPD provided a forum to oversee and drive the bilateral defence relationship. This phase of bilateral relations was also characterised by two key elements. First, was the deepening of existing naval ties. In contrast to previous years when exercises were held in Indian waters, SIMBEX 2005 had RSN and IN forces training in the South China Sea for the first time.⁵² In addition, this exercise included the unprecedented maritime interdiction component. Together with the signing of Standard Operating Procedures during SIMBEX 2006 “to be used as a guide for all future exercises between the two navies,” the new trend indicated the growing interest of both states in having a maritime security collaboration in Southeast Asian waters.⁵³ During SIMBEX 07, held from 23 to 28 March 2007 in the South China Sea, the RSN deployed two missile corvettes, a missile gunboat, an anti-submarine patrol vessel and a submarine. The IN was supported by two destroyers and a corvette.⁵⁴

Secondly, defence relations between Singapore and India since 2003 have broadened in scope to include regular dialogue and exercises involving their armies and air forces. On 22 March 2004, the inaugural Singapore-India DPD between the two defence secretaries provided “a regular forum ... to discuss defence cooperation and regional defence and security issues.”⁵⁵ This was followed by the signing of the Treaty on Mutual Legal Assistance in June 2005, in which each state pledged to curb

⁵² “What’s Hot? Analysis of Recent Happenings,” at http://www.indiadefence.com/navy_ex.htm (Accessed September 27, 2006)

⁵³ “Indian and Singapore Navies Conclude Bilateral Exercise,” at http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/news_and_events/nr/2006/mar/11mar06_nr.html (Accessed September 27, 2006)

⁵⁴ “Singapore and Indian Navies Conduct Bilateral Exercise”, at http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/news_and_events/nr/2007/mar/23mar07_nr.html

⁵⁵ “Inaugural India-Singapore Defence Policy Dialogue,” at http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/news_and_events/nr/2004/mar/22mar04_nr.html (Accessed September 27, 2006)

funding for terrorist organisations.⁵⁶ During the fourth DPD in October 2007, Singapore and India signed a long-term, joint training and exercises agreement for the two air forces.⁵⁷ This arrangement will allow the RSAF to keep some of its military equipment in India on a permanent basis.⁵⁸ This was because “Singapore simply does not have the space for its armed forces to engage in large-scale exercises. Though its armed forces have been coming here for exercises under a 2003 defence cooperation pact, this will be the first time such a detailed long-term agreement has been signed”.⁵⁹

As per this agreement, the RSAF will be permitted to train at the Indian Air Force base at Kalaikunda, West Bengal “at notified times”.⁶⁰ For the RSAF, the Kalaikunda Air Force Base was ideal as it has ground firing and aerial combat range, facilities for electronic warfare training and is also where the IAF conducts its ‘*Lakshya*’ aerial combat training for unmanned aerial vehicles.⁶¹ The basing agreement was important because in addition to signifying the growing convergence of security perspectives, it compensated somewhat for the failure of the Indonesian parliament to ratify a similar agreement that was signed in July 2007. In the Indonesian case, the parliamentarians rejected the agreement signed by the two governments on grounds that Singapore had benefitted disproportionately and that Indonesia’s

⁵⁶ S. Devare, *India and Southeast Asia: Towards Security Convergence* ISEAS, Singapore, 2006, pp. 63 and 68.

⁵⁷ Ravi Vellor, “Singapore and India strike air force training deal”, *The Straits Times*, October 10, 2007.

⁵⁸ Rajat Pandit, “India to train Singapore armed forces”, *The Times of India*, October 9, 2007.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Josy Joseph, “Singapore leases IAF base for 5 years”, *Daily News and Analysis*, October 10, 2007.

⁶¹ Manu Pubby, “Deal inked, Singapore to use Bengal airbase for F-16 training”, *Indian Express*, October 10, 2007.

sovereignty and territorial integrity was being undermined by the DCA.⁶²

The SINDEX series of exercises between the Singapore and Indian air forces were held for the first time at Gwalior Air Force Station, in 2004⁶³ and at the Kalaikunda air force station in eastern India in 2006.⁶⁴ The Singapore army also started training with its Indian counterparts in 2005, after Singapore army chief, Desmond Kwek, signed an MOU with Alok Prasad the Indian high commissioner to Singapore. The ‘Pouncing Tiger’ series of armour exercises were held at the Babina field firing range while the ‘Agni Warrior’ artillery exercises were conducted at the Deolali Firing Range.⁶⁵ From October 15 to November 6, 2007, the fourth joint artillery exercise was conducted to “understand each other’s doctrine and tactics as well as enhance mutual understanding and interoperability”.⁶⁶ The exercise was observed by Singapore’s defence minister, Teo Chee Hean, who was on his third visit to India following his earlier visits in October 2003 and 2005. This expansion of defence exchanges between the two countries not

⁶² In July 2007, both Singapore and Indonesia signed two agreements, the Defence Cooperation Agreement and the Extradition Agreement, in what was described as a ‘package deal’. However, following the signing of the two agreements by ministers from both sides, Indonesian Parliamentarians objected to the DCA on grounds that the SAF was given excessive rights to undertake military training and live firing. See ‘Defence Cooperation Not Ratified Before Bravo Area Completion’ *Tempo Interactive*, August 30, 2007; “Pemerintah Indonesia Tidak Meminta Renegosiasi” (Indonesian Government Did not Ask for Renegotiation), *Suara Pembaruan*, August 12, 2007.

⁶³ “Singapore and India Hold Inaugural Bilateral Air Exercise,” at http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/news_and_events/nr/2004/oct/26oct04_nr.html (Accessed September 27, 2006)

⁶⁴ “Republic of Singapore Air Force and Indian Air Force Conduct Second Bilateral Air Exercise,” at http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/news_and_events/nr/2006/jan/03jan06_nr.html (Accessed September 27, 2006)

⁶⁵ “Singapore and India Sign Memorandum of Understanding for Army Exercise in India,” at http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/news_and_events/nr/2005/jan/17jan05_nr.html (Accessed September 27, 2006)

⁶⁶ See “Minster for Defence Visits Bilateral Artillery Exercise in India” at http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/news_and_events/nr/2007/oct/17oct07_nr.html

only indicates the likelihood of the SAF gaining access to Indian training grounds on a more permanent basis, but could also lead to closer security cooperation in the long term.

Other Southeast Asian States Bilateral Defence Cooperation with India

India has also been holding bilateral naval exercises with Thailand since 1995. There have since been intermittent discussions between the India and Thailand on counter-terrorism and intelligence sharing. There has also been a steady increase in defence cooperation between Cambodia and India and includes visits by Indian defence and military officials to Phnom Penh, goodwill visits by Indian naval ships, supply of medical equipment and training of Cambodian military personnel in India. In December 2005, both countries signed an agreement for combating international terrorism, organised crime and illicit drug trafficking. Myanmar-India defence relations are largely a post-LEP phenomenon because of the chilly relations between the two. While defence ties started gradually, these have expanded quite respectably with regular high level exchange visits by military officials, gifts of military supplies and conduct of military exercises. For example, Myanmar naval chiefs Vice Admiral Soe Thane and Nyan Tun visited Delhi in April 2007 and February 2010 respectively. Similarly, the Indian navy chiefs, Admiral Arun Prakash and Suresh Mehta visited Yangon in January 2006 and May 2007 respectively. Since 2006, India has transferred 5 BN-2 'Defender' islander maritime surveillance aircraft, T-55 tanks, 105mm artillery guns, mortars, radar, light helicopters, assault rifles and machine guns and ordinance to Myanmar. India has also conducted naval exercises with Myanmar. For instance, in 2004, India deployed two *Khukri*-class warships in a naval exercise with the Myanmar navy.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ See Anushree Bhattacharya, "India's Joint Naval Exercises in the ASEAN Region", Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, August 3, 2007.

Multilateral Southeast Asia-India Defence Relations

India's multilateral security engagements with Southeast Asia in the new millennium have been conditioned by two circumstances, namely, engagement under the auspices of the ARF and unilateral Indian initiatives such as the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) in February 2008. The ARF, perhaps mired in the traditions of the 'ASEAN Way',⁶⁸ has, while providing a forum for diplomatic consultation, consensus and cooperation on transnational traditional and non-traditional security issues, not done much else as compared to other security arrangements such as NATO, for example.⁶⁹ Despite the divergent views on the success of the ARF and ASEAN in general as a security tool,⁷⁰ India's inclusion, along with all the major world powers, in a

⁶⁸ Article 2 of the 1976 Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC), saliently articulated the core elements of the ASEAN Way. Accommodation, Consultation and Consensus, Non-Interference in internal issues, and "Agreeing to Disagree" have been some of the common terms and phrases used to describe the ASEAN Way. These fundamental values have been at the nucleus of how ASEAN conducts its business. See Mely Caballero-Anthony, *Regional Security in Southeast Asia: Beyond the ASEAN Way*, ISEAS, Singapore, 2005, pp.39-42 and pp.64-78.

⁶⁹ Hiro Katsumata, "Establishment of the ASEAN Regional Forum: Constructing a 'Talking Shop' or a 'Norm Brewery'?", *The Pacific Review* 19 (2) June 2006, pp.193-195. See also C.P.F. Luhulima, *Scope of ASEAN's Security Framework for the 21st Century*, ISEAS, Singapore, 2000.

⁷⁰ ASEAN's resolve for peaceful resolution of issues has been tested on many occasions. The territorial dispute over Sabah between Malaysia and Philippines in 1968, the furore in Indonesia over the hanging of two Indonesian Marines convicted of sabotage by Singapore in 1968 and the hanging of Flor Contemplacion in Singapore for the murder of another Filipino maid in 1995, were some of the potential pitfalls for ASEAN. Territorial disputes between ASEAN members include the tussle over *Pedra Branca* between Malaysia and Singapore, *Sipadan* and *Ligitan* between Malaysia and Indonesia and the border between Myanmar and Thailand. The referral of the first two issues to the International Court of Justice for arbitration highlights two characteristics of ASEAN. See also Kanti Bajpai, "The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM), and Security in the Asia Pacific," Paper presented at the conference on an Asia Pacific community, Sydney, December 3-5, 2009.

security forum of this magnitude attests India's perceived security role in the region.

In general, the ARF allowed ASEAN members and major extra-regional powers such as India to discuss common security challenges and engage in confidence-building measures to reduce suspicions and tensions between the great powers. While Singapore strongly pushed for India's entry into the ARF in 1996 and allowed New Delhi to break out of its South Asian diplomatic confines, India, at the same time, skilfully used its membership in the ARF to "project itself on the wider Asia Pacific scene."⁷¹ India's hosting of ARF seminars on maritime security and peacekeeping,⁷² together with its accession to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation [TAC] in 2003, reassured ASEAN of its benign intentions and facilitated further defence cooperation between India and the Southeast Asian states. In view of the increasing convergence of views on terrorism, they initialled the ASEAN-India Joint Declaration for Cooperation to Combat International Terrorism in 2003.

India's unilateral initiatives, particularly through the Indian navy, have been much more effective and proactive when compared to its multilateral security initiatives through ASEAN. While the Indian navy's efforts gathered momentum in the 1990s, in 2000 the Indian navy for the first time, conducted operations as far east as the South China Sea. While many perceived this to be a challenge to Chinese naval hegemony in what they have come to claim as their own territory, the Indian navy also conducted bilateral exercises with the People's Liberation Army navy.⁷³ The Indian navy assisted in the 2004 *tsunami* relief efforts by

⁷¹ S. Devare, no. 56, p. 76.

⁷² "ASEAN Regional Forum – List of Track I Activities," at <http://www.aseanregionalforum.org/Default.aspx?tabid=123> (Accessed September 27, 2006)

⁷³ "India Challenges China in South China Sea," *Asia Times Online*, April 26, 2000 at <http://www.atimes.com/ind-pak/BD27Df01.html> (Accessed February 26, 2010).

contributing 32 ships in four different areas: on the Indian coast, the Maldives, Sri Lanka and Indonesia. This not only displayed the IN's operational readiness but also went a long way in showing the world that the Indian navy could cooperate with other advanced 'blue water' navies such as those from the US, Australia and Japan, and contribute substantially to HADR operations. The 2007 instalment of the *Malabar* series of exercises raised concerns over the formation of an "Asian NATO", but India has repeatedly asserted that it is more concerned about the defence of its own assets than in the creation of new alliances.⁷⁴ This was perhaps proven when in 2008, India hosted the inaugural Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), and excluded China, the US and Japan. The stated goal of IONS was "constructive engagement as a means of assuring mutually beneficial maritime security" and enable all the navy chiefs of the littoral states in the Indian Ocean region to meet and engage each other constructively even though there were also provisions for "other relevant maritime entities" to participate in future.⁷⁵ While India may claim that the invitations were geographical in origin, India's strategic intent to affirm its independent engagement in the Indian Ocean was unmistakable.⁷⁶

Besides the ARF, ASEAN member-states and India have also participated in other multilateral initiatives. For example, Singapore has participated in the MILAN series of naval exercises off the Andaman and Nicobar Islands that have been held biennially since 1995. The ASEAN member-states that participated in the 'MILAN' exercises held in February 2010 included Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Brunei,

⁷⁴ See Praful Bidwai, "Five-Nation Naval Drill Presages 'Asian NATO'?", *AntiWar.com*, September 9, 2007 at <http://original.antiwar.com/bidwai/2007/09/08/five-nation-naval-drill-presages-asian-nato/> (Accessed March 16, 2010).

⁷⁵ See Indian Ocean Naval Symposium at <http://indianavy.nic.in/ion.htm>.

⁷⁶ See G.V.C. Naidu, no. 17, pp. 331-346.

Vietnam and Myanmar.⁷⁷ The annual Western Pacific Naval Seminar [WPNS] established common communications procedures among Asia Pacific navies in 2001 and facilitated the sharing of information on piracy.⁷⁸ In 2006, Singapore became the Information Sharing Centre for the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships in Asia [ReCAAP].⁷⁹ Such regional efforts to improve maritime security would in turn complement existing defence ties between India and ASEAN member-states. In September 2007, Singapore participated in *Exercise Malabar*, a naval war game in the Bay of Bengal, alongside Indian, American, Australian and Japanese naval vessels.⁸⁰

Of watershed significance in Southeast Asia-India multilateral defence cooperation was India's participation in the inaugural ASEAN defence ministers meeting + 8 (ADMM + 8) forum, held for the first time in Hanoi in October 2010. The first ADMM was held in 2006 and it was only in the May 2009 ADMM meeting that it was agreed to form the ADMM + Plus forum which culminated in the ADMM + 8, including India as a member (the others being Australia, China, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea,

⁷⁷ *MILAN 2006* was particularly significant as it was the first time in more than forty years that a naval ship from Myanmar, in this case, the '*Anawratha*', had travelled beyond the country's territorial waters. See <http://www.burmanet.org./news/2006/01/12/narinjara-news-burmes-junta-sends-navy-shi...>; see Sinderpal Singh and Syeda Sana Rahman, "The Next Stage of Singapore-India Relations: Possibilities and Prospects", Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore, ISAS Working Paper, No. 91, September 24, 2009.

⁷⁸ "Speech by Minister of State for Defence and Information and the Arts Mr David T.E. Lim at the Opening Ceremony of the 1st Western Pacific Mine Countermeasure Exercise and the 1st Western Pacific Diving Exercise Held on Tuesday, 12 June 2001 at 1525 hrs at Tuas Naval Base," at http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/news_and_events/nr/2001/jun/12jun01_nr/12jun01_speech.html (Accessed September 27, 2006)

⁷⁹ "Cooperating for Peace and Security" - Speech by Minister for Defence at the 8th IDSS Asia-Pacific Programme," at http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/news_and_events/nr/2006/aug/07aug06_nr.html (Accessed September 27, 2006)

⁸⁰ Ravi Vellor, no.57.

Russia and the United States). At the ADMM + 8, India was represented by Defence Minister A.K. Antony. While this is not the first time that an Indian defence minister has participated in a Southeast Asian forum - India has been participating in the Shangri-la Dialogue since 2003, - India's inclusion in the ADMM + 8 is a clear indication that it is regarded as a crucial security player in the Southeast Asian region, and was formally recognised as such through its membership in the organisation. As was argued by A.K Antony, India's participation in the ADMM + 8 was aimed at addressing "the regional peace and security challenges by providing balanced and inclusive security architecture for the region as a whole and provide opportunities to build mutual trust and confidence among the defence establishments of the ASEAN and the Plus countries".⁸¹

⁸¹ See "Antony to Attend ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting in Hanoi" at <http://indiadefenceonline.com/2240/antony-to-attend-asean-defence-ministers-meeting-in-hanoi/>

Implications of Growing Southeast Asia-India Defence Relations

The growing defence relations between two important players in Asia, ASEAN, as a regional collective of individual states and India, as a major Asian power, have had important political-security implications. First, they have led to the augmentation of Southeast Asia states' defence capabilities in a number of ways. The joint exercises with India's armed forces, have allowed militaries in Southeast Asia to gain from Indian military doctrines. Also, the largely pro-Western military doctrines of most ASEAN states, due to longstanding relations of most Southeast Asian states with the West, can be balanced as Southeast Asian militaries are most likely to operate in a geographical environment different from that of Western militaries.

Secondly, for some Southeast Asian states, training with the Indians has helped them get a better understanding of the potential adversary within the Southeast Asian region itself. For instance, training with India, familiarises the SAF with some of the military equipment and tactics used by Malaysia because India and Malaysia use similar equipment. Malaysia acquired 18 *MiG-29* fighters from Russia in 1994 and 18 *Sukhoi Su-30* fighters in 2003. Both aircraft are also in service with the Indian air force, and were deployed by the IAF against the RSAF in their inaugural bilateral air exercise in October 2004.⁸² Similarly, with regard to armoured vehicles, Malaysia ordered 48 Polish PT-91 tanks in 2003, an advanced variant of the Russian T-72 tank possessed by the Indian army, which were deployed against the SAF during

⁸² For further details of air exercises, refer to Appendix One.

bilateral armour exercises in 2006.⁸³ Also, Malaysia ordered two *Scorpena* submarines from France and Spain in 2002, while India ordered six such submarines in 2005.⁸⁴ Also India's role in training the Malaysian armed forces has increased. In 1993, India and Malaysia signed a MoU on defence cooperation, which allowed Malaysian pilots to train on *MiG-29* fighter aircraft in India.⁸⁵ In January 2008, another agreement was signed, by which Indian personnel would train Malaysian air force pilots and technicians within Malaysia for two years. This was "on top of similar training in India for Malaysian air force personnel flying Russian made *Sukhoi Su-30* fighters."⁸⁶ The two states also agreed to "consider the possibility of cooperation in the joint maintenance and use of *Scorpena* submarines" recently ordered by their navies.⁸⁷ Familiarisation with the equipment and tactics of the Malaysian armed forces would strengthen the deterrent power of the SAF against Malaysia as well as provide the SAF with an important tactical advantage in the event of conflict.

Further, India helped Singapore to develop new capabilities, notably in submarine warfare and anti-submarine warfare. In the case of the RSN, it benefitted in three ways from training with the Indians. First, it provided "valuable 'hands-on' experience before Singapore acquired its own submarines from Sweden in the late 1990s".⁸⁸ Second, it provided RSN sufficient time to hone

⁸³ See "PT-91 Twardy Main Battle Tank," at < <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/europe/pt-91.htm> > (cited March 2, 2008) and "40 SAR's Great Indian Adventure," at < http://www.totaldefence.sg/imindef/mindef_websites/atozlistings/army/army_news/Feature/2006_Features/40_SAR_Great_Indian_Adventure.html > (cited March 2, 2010)

⁸⁴ See "Scorpena: India's Latest Weapon," at < <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/msid-1228512,prtpage-1.cms> > (cited March 2, 2008) and Appendix Six.

⁸⁵ See Yogendra Singh, "India-Malaysia Relations It is Time to Get Going," IPCS Special Report No.42, June 2007 at < <http://www.ipcs.org/IPCS-Special-Report-42.pdf> > (cited March 2, 2010) and Udai Bhanu Singh, "India and Southeast Asia: Enhanced Defence and Strategic Ties."

⁸⁶ See "Malaysia, India to Step up Defence Cooperation," at < <http://in.reuters.com/article/topNews/idINIndia-31272920080107?sp=true> > (cited March 2, 2008).

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Tim Huxley, no. 6, p.220

its capabilities through sustained naval exercises over fourteen years. Third, it familiarised the RSN with potential areas of operations by conducting such exercises in the South China Sea, Andaman Sea and Bay of Bengal.⁸⁹ The development of such capabilities has vastly improved the RSN's ability to protect the vital sea lanes of communications and disrupt Malaysia's or any other country's maritime communications, in the event of conflict.

Fourthly, for Southeast Asian armies such as the SAF regular exercises with the Indians have improved their ability to conduct large scale, complex military operations by gaining access to larger Indian training facilities and increasing the difficulty level of exercises conducted with India over the years. Following the RSAF's lease of Kalaikunda airbase in 2007, India now joins Australia, France and the US as an important training ground for the Singapore air force. Meanwhile, the expansion of bilateral armour and artillery exercises, coupled with negotiations for the SAF to station army personnel and equipment in Indian facilities, which India has agreed to in principle, would increase India's importance to Singapore as an army training ground.⁹⁰ This would provide valuable training opportunities for senior SAF commanders in the command and control of large military formations, and improve their ability to conduct operations across large territories.

Lastly, Singapore, has been able to enhance its military's technological edge over potential adversaries through cooperation with India. For instance, some analysts have noted Singapore's interest in developing stealth, surveillance and electronic warfare capabilities since the 1990s as a force multiplier.⁹¹ Given New

⁸⁹ For details of locations where naval exercises were conducted, refer to Appendix Three.

⁹⁰ Rahul Bedi, "India Considers Singapore Request for Shared Training," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, May 24, 2006

⁹¹ See Bilveer Singh, *Arming the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF): Trends and Implications*, Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence No. 153, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University, Canberra, 2003, pp.28-32 and pp. 37-41, and Tim Huxley, no. 6, pp, 254-255.

Delhi's highly developed defence technology sector and its linkages with Singapore's other defence partners such as Israel and the US, defence technology cooperation with India would complement and enhance Singapore's own research in the above areas.⁹²

Closer defence relations with India, have also enabled Southeast Asian states to enhance their capacity for managing non-traditional security threats. Both Southeast Asian states and India have a common interest in overcoming the threat posed by Islamist and other terrorists as well as piracy, and this has brought both closer militarily. For instance, close collaboration with India has allowed Singapore to enhance its ability to track down on AJAI members, through intelligence exchanges. This is because linkages between AJAI and other Islamist terror groups in South Asia allow India to uncover any plans hatched by AJAI to attack Southeast Asian states, monitor the movement of AJAI operatives from South to Southeast Asia and arrest these operatives before a terrorist attack is executed. This linkage was revealed in September 2003 when two Singapore AJAI members who attended training camps in Karachi, organised by Pakistan based terror organization *Lashkar-e-Toiba* (LeT), were arrested.⁹³ While cooperation with Pakistan allowed Singapore to arrest AJAI members in this instance, but India's monitoring of the LeT and other terror groups makes it a useful partner in Singapore's counterterrorism efforts.

⁹² In the annual report of the Indian Defence Ministry (2006-07), it was reported that India's defence technology cooperation with Singapore, Russia, the US, France, Israel, Britain and other states covered research into "missile technologies, avionics and aircraft technologies, microwaves, laser systems, new materials, nano-materials, stealth, hypersonic and naval systems." See "Annual Report 2006-2007: Ministry of Defence, Government of India," at <<http://mod.nic.in/reports/MOD-English2007.pdf>> (cited March 2, 2008).

⁹³ See "PT-91 Twardy Main Battle Tank," at <<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/europe/pt-91.htm>> (cited March 2, 2008) and "40 SAR's Great Indian Adventure," <http://www.totaldefence.sg/imindef/mindef_websites/atozlistings/army/army_news/Feature/2006_Features/40_SAR_Great_Indian_Adventure.html> (cited March 2, 2008).

Engaging India has also allowed Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia to mitigate the threats of maritime terrorism and piracy, though the degree of success is less in the case of counterterrorism cooperation. For instance, the RSN has improved its counter-piracy and maritime interdiction capabilities through naval exercises with India. However, India's contribution in securing the Malacca Strait, a vital sea lane of communications for Singapore, is limited by the opposition of Malaysia and Indonesia to foreign navies patrolling the Strait, as they regard it as an infringement of their sovereignty.⁹⁴

Closer Southeast Asia-India defence engagement has enhanced stability in Southeast Asia because of the Indian contribution to the regional balance of power. India's defence deployment has underscored India's greater ability to project its military power into Southeast Asia, thus balancing the military power of China and others in the region. Singapore's support for India's entry into the ARF and other regional multilateral institutions, allowed New Delhi to increase its diplomatic influence in Southeast Asia. This was demonstrated in 2005, when Singapore and other ASEAN states supported India's entry into the East Asian Summit (EAS) despite Chinese attempts to dissuade ASEAN from doing so.⁹⁵ In the context of reduced US influence in the region, India's

⁹⁴ Malaysia and Indonesia opposed the US proposal for a Regional Maritime Security Initiative which envisioned placing US forces on high-speed boats to intercept and inspect ships travelling along the Malacca Strait, citing it as an infringement of their sovereignty. This was in contrast to Singapore's position, which welcomed the contribution of extra-regional powers in securing the Strait. See "Straits of Malacca: Security Implications," at < <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/papers11/paper1033.html> > (cited March 2, 2008) As a result, India has offered to contribute to security of the Strait, but "subject to the desire of the littoral states." See "Address by Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, Defence Minister of India, at the Fifth IISS Asia Security Summit (Shangri-La Dialogue), Singapore June 02-04, 2006," at < <http://www.iiss.org/conferences/the-shangri-la-dialogue/shangri-la-dialogue-2006/2006-plenary-session-speeches/second-plenary-session-pranab-mukherjee/> > (cited March 2, 2010).

⁹⁵ Rich Bowden, "Battle Looms Over Inaugural East Asia Summit", *Worldpress.org*, December 11, 2005 at <http://www.worldpress.org/Asia/2192.cfm>; and Mohan Malik, "China and the East Asian Summit: More discord than Accord" at www.apcss.org, Asia-Pacific Centre for Security Studies, Honolulu, Hawaii, 2006.

presence in the EAS and the ARF served to balance China's rising diplomatic influence in Southeast Asia.

For most Southeast Asian states, closer defence ties with India have enhanced their strategic manoeuvrability within the region and with extra-regional actors. For instance, Singapore's enhanced security relations with India have allowed the Republic greater strategic manoeuvrability vis-à-vis neighbours and extra-regional powers in a number of ways. As in the case of other ASEAN members, it increased Singapore's strategic manoeuvrability vis-à-vis the US in two ways. First, it has increased Washington's desire to strengthen security relations with Singapore. Singapore's closer security ties with New Delhi have increased the city state's importance in the US strategy of supporting a more assertive Indian military posture to balance China.⁹⁶ This was accomplished by Singapore by facilitating more frequent Indian military deployments in Southeast Asia, thereby reducing the political, manpower and financial burden of the US. The signing of the US-Singapore Strategic Framework Agreement in Defence and Security in 2005, two years after Singapore's DCA with India covering similar areas of cooperation, demonstrates Washington's interest in increasing its security engagement with Singapore, to complement closer Singapore-India security ties as a balance to China.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ In June 2005, the US and India signed the "New Framework for the US-India Defence Relationship," allowing for greater defence exchanges through conducting exercises and engaging in dialogues. See "US-India Defence Relationship," at < <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Mar2006/d20060302us-indiaderelationship.pdf> > (cited March 2, 2010).

⁹⁷ The Strategic Framework Agreement between Singapore and the US included establishing a defence policy dialogue, holding military exercises, exchanges of intelligence and personnel on training programmes, and defence technology cooperation. For the full text of the Singapore-US Strategic Framework Agreement, see "Strategic Framework Agreement between the United States of America and the Republic of Singapore for a Closer Cooperation Partnership in Defence and Security," at < <http://se2.isn.ch/serviceengine/FileContent?serviceID=23&fileid=D147CAFD-9C40-FB05-2DEF-ED4873138430&lng=en> > (cited March 2, 2010).

Second, engagement with India has reduced US leverage over Singapore in two ways. First, Singapore has been able to reduce its dependence on the US to promote its other security interests. This is due to India's growing importance in enhancing the SAF's conventional military capabilities, helping Singapore to overcome unconventional security threats and contributing to regional stability. Also, India's security relations with Russia, France and Israel provide Singapore with opportunities to leverage its ties with India to enhance its cooperation with these three states. Secondly, despite New Delhi's growing relations with Washington, US influence over Singapore remained limited because India has maintained its strategic independence in relation to the US.⁹⁸

India's interest in intensifying its current security and diplomatic engagement of Singapore and other Southeast Asian states, is for two reasons. First, Singapore's importance as a gateway for India to project its military presence in Southeast and East Asia has increased. This is due to Singapore's strategic location along maritime routes linking South, Southeast and East Asia, its well-developed infrastructure relative to Myanmar and Vietnam, and willingness to facilitate India's presence in the region relative to Malaysia and Indonesia.

Second, engaging Singapore also provides India a less politically controversial avenue to enhance India's military capabilities, as compared to engaging with larger powers. Joint exercises with the SAF, allows the mostly Russian-equipped Indian armed forces to familiarise themselves with Western military equipment and doctrines, which is used by the SAF and other Southeast Asia states. Such familiarisation would allow New Delhi to make a more informed choice when acquiring new weapons and enhance its ability to resist future incursions by the US-equipped Pakistani

⁹⁸ India's desire to retain its strategic autonomy is recognized by several US observers. See Lisa Curtis and John J. Tkacik, "China and India: Thawing Relations Unlikely to Lead to Strategic Partnership," at <[http:// www.heritage.org/Research/AsiaandthePacific/wm1272.cfm](http://www.heritage.org/Research/AsiaandthePacific/wm1272.cfm)> (cited March 2, 2008)

military. Indeed, the IAF has expressed its interest to familiarise itself with Pakistan's F-16 fighter aircraft by exercising with the RSAF's F-16 fighters.⁹⁹ Second, unlike its relations with the US, India does not need to worry that enhanced security engagement with Singapore would reduce its strategic autonomy as Singapore's small size precludes this possibility.

Singapore's engagement of India has also increased China's interest in improving diplomatic and security relations with Singapore given the Sino-Indian competition for strategic influence in Southeast Asia. Also, due to Singapore's close security ties with the US and India, and continued US and Indian suspicions of China's hegemonic ambitions in Southeast Asia, China has an interest in pre-empting the possibility of Singapore joining an anti-China security bloc. China's concerns began in May 2007 when Australian, Indian, Japanese and US representatives met during the ARF meeting to form the Quadrilateral Initiative, "a natural partnership between countries which share values and growing cooperation."¹⁰⁰ China's worry that the Initiative was expanding and being operationalised into a military coalition increased after Singapore joined the four members of the Initiative in Exercise Malabar (series number 07-2), held in the Bay of Bengal, within range of Chinese electronic monitoring facilities in Myanmar.¹⁰¹ Following Australia's withdrawal from the Initiative in February 2008, Beijing has an incentive to improve relations with Singapore and prevent the city state from joining

⁹⁹ Manu Pubby, "Deal inked, Singapore to use Bengal airbase for F-16 training", *Indian Express*, October 10, 2007. Also see <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/deal-inked-singapore-to-use-be>.

¹⁰⁰ See "Commonwealth of Australia Official Committee Hansard: Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade," at <http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard/senate/commtee/S10266.pdf?bcsi_scan_F5FF4FB97BAF242A=0&bcsi_scan_filename=S10266.pdf> (cited March 2, 2008).

¹⁰¹ See "New 'Strategic Partnership' Against China," at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/6968412.stm> (cited March 2, 2008) and "Malabar 07-02," at <<http://www.bharat-rakshak.com/NAVY/Galleries/Bridges/2007/Malabar0702/>> (cited March 2, 2008). For more details on Chinese military facilities in Myanmar, see "China's Ambitions in Myanmar: India Steps Up Countermoves," *Strategic Comments* 6 (6) July 2000.

the Initiative.¹⁰² Additionally, closer ties with Singapore could provide China a gateway to increase its naval presence in the Bay of Bengal, Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea over the long term. This would complement Beijing's "String of Pearls" strategy, to increase its strategic influence over maritime routes between the Middle East and China,¹⁰³ to secure its energy supplies from the Middle East and challenge India's predominance in South Asia. In the above context, the DCA signed between Singapore and China in January 2008 signified Beijing's interest in broadening relations with Singapore to include security cooperation.¹⁰⁴

Not only have Southeast Asian states increased their manoeuvrability vis-à-vis the external powers, closer ties with India have also increased their room for strategic manoeuvre vis-à-vis each other. For example, closer Singapore-India security cooperation has strengthened Singapore's position in its diplomatic and security relations with Malaysia and Indonesia in two ways. Singapore is now able to decrease its dependence on Malaysia and Indonesia to defend its other security interests, and hence reduce their leverage over Singapore. This was illustrated in October 2007 when Singapore signed a five year lease allowing the RSAF to station personnel and equipment in India, which partially allowed it to overcome obstacles in accessing Indonesian training facilities, following the rejection by the

¹⁰² In February 2008, Australian Foreign Minister Stephen Smith announced that Australia would not join a quadrilateral dialogue between Australia, the US, Japan and India. See "Australia India Relations," at < <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/saturdayextra/stories/2008/2157619.htm> > (cited March 2, 2008).

¹⁰³ As part of this strategy, China has attempted to gain footholds along strategically located states such as Pakistan, Bangladesh and Myanmar by upgrading their port facilities in return for Chinese access to these facilities. See Christopher J. Pherson, "String of Pearls: Meeting the Challenge of China's Rising Power Across the Asian Littoral," at < <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/PUB721.pdf> > (Cited March 2, 2010)

¹⁰⁴ "Permanent Secretary (Defence) Signs Agreement on Defence Exchanges and Security Cooperation with China at Inaugural Defence Policy Dialogue," at < http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/news_and_events/nr/2008/jan/07jan08_nr.html > (Cited March 2, 2010).

Indonesian parliament of a Singapore-Indonesia DCA signed in April 2007.¹⁰⁵ Improved Singapore-India security relations, complemented by the economic and diplomatic engagement, have created closer strategic relations with New Delhi relative to Malaysia and Indonesia.¹⁰⁶ Such a development, coupled with Singapore's existing relationship with the US, has forced Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta to consider the possibility of extra-regional powers providing diplomatic support for, or even intervening on behalf of, Singapore in the event of a dispute with Singapore. This makes Malaysia and Indonesia more accommodating of Singapore's interests when resolving such disputes.

While closer security relations with India have enhanced Southeast Asian states' security interests, on the flip side, they also have the potential to restrict strategic manoeuvrability. With regard to Singapore, for instance, the Republic's strategic manoeuvrability might be restricted in two possible ways. First, closer Singapore-India security relations could damage Singapore's diplomatic relations with China by making Beijing wary of Singapore falling into India's sphere of influence. Already, Beijing has expressed its displeasure over closer Singapore-US relations and cancelled bilateral visits after the then Singapore Deputy Prime Minister

¹⁰⁵ See "Reply by Defence Minister Teo Chee Hean on the Defence Cooperation Agreement in Parliament" at http://www.mindef.gov.sg/iminded/news_and_events/nr/2007/jul/16jul07_nr.html, (cited March 2, 2010); and Vibhanshu Shekar, "India and Singapore Move Towards Mutual Capacity Building", Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, New Delhi, No. 2404, October 29, 2007. Also see <http://www.ipcs.org/article/defence/india-and-singapore-move-towards-mutual-capacity-building-2404.html>

¹⁰⁶ Singapore's closer strategic ties with India relative to Malaysia and Indonesia are demonstrated by two events. Firstly, Singapore was the first Southeast Asian state to sign a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement with India in 2005, which showed New Delhi's desire to develop closer economic links with Singapore. Secondly, Singapore was the first and only foreign state allowed to station military equipment in India on a long term basis after signing the "Bilateral Agreement for the Conduct of Joint Military Training and Exercises in India" in 2007. In contrast, Jakarta's request for India to train Indonesia pilots on the use of Su-30 fighter aircraft in 2004 was "kept on hold by New Delhi." See "India Says Not Yet to Indonesian Plea," *Indian Express* April 21, 2004.

Lee Hsien Loong's visit to Taiwan in 2004.¹⁰⁷ Second, Singapore might be forced to choose between China and India because both may attempt to bring Singapore inside their sphere of influence, to the exclusion of its strategic competitor. Here, Singapore (or any other Southeast Asian state) runs the risk of damaging ties with both China and India, if it attempts to improve relations with the two powers simultaneously. As Singapore is only a small state, it runs the risk of being treated as a junior partner by both the Asian powers, in turn, restricting its strategic autonomy even though the original goal was just the reverse.

Closer defence ties with Southeast Asian states also have varied consequences for India especially on the political and strategic fronts. Given New Delhi's preoccupation with the immediate South Asian security situation and in the face of China's rising power, Southeast Asia is not the only area of focus for Indian policy makers. Nevertheless, it has become relatively important since the mid-1990s even though Indian leaders have denied that this is to counter and neutralise rising Chinese influence and power. For instance, Sudhir Devare, the former secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs, stated that "India does not and should not seek closer military ties with Southeast Asia as a bulwark against China or Pakistan" because such a policy would be conceptually flawed and politically disastrous.¹⁰⁸ This position stems from India's awareness of its military limitations and sees no benefit accruing from fostering any sort of rivalry with China. More importantly, it would be able to achieve its foreign policy and security objectives more easily through cooperation¹⁰⁹ Still,

¹⁰⁷ Teo Chu Cheow "Rising Sino-US Rivalry: A Case in Point Following the Recent Sino-Singaporean Row over Taiwan," at <<http://www.tp.org.tw/eletter/story.htm?id=20004306>> (cited March 2, 2008).

¹⁰⁸ S. Devare, no. 56, p.211.

¹⁰⁹ Pranab Mukherjee, "Second Plenary Session - India: A Rising Global Player," *International Institute for Strategic Studies*, June 3, 2006 at <http://www.iiss.org/conferences/the-shangri-la-dialogue/shangri-la-dialogue-archive/shangri-la-dialogue-2006/2006-plenary-session-speeches/second-plenary-session-pranab-mukherjee/> (Accessed March 10, 2010).

increasingly Indian policy makers have begun staking a claim in the Southeast Asian security complex, indirectly alluding to India's role as a critical player in the maintenance of balance of power in the region, especially from the Indian Ocean to the South China Sea region. In 1999, Jaswant Singh, though denying that India conducts its international relations "believing in any sphere of influence" mentioned that the "footprint of India's stability factor really spreads from Malacca, or even east of Malacca to Aden".¹¹⁰ In 2000, George Fernandes, the Indian defence minister, spoke of an Indian area of interest from the "north of the Arabian Sea to the South China Sea".¹¹¹ In 2001, Jaswant Singh defined the area bound by the Persian Gulf in the west to Indonesia in the east as being in India's "sphere of influence."¹¹² This position was reiterated by current prime minister, Manmohan Singh in 2004:

Our strategic footprint covers the region bounded by the Horn of Africa, West Asia, Central Asia, South-East Asia and beyond, to the far reaches of the Indian Ocean. Awareness of this reality should inform and animate our strategic thinking and defence planning.¹¹³

In this regard, India's defence diplomacy has been remarkable, in particular, the role of the Indian Navy, which in many ways, has been ahead of government's bureaucracy in forging closer ties with Southeast Asia, and in the process, increasing their confidence in India's military power.

¹¹⁰ "India is a Stabilising Factor in Asia", Interview, Jaswant Singh, *Business Standard*, August 13, 1999.

¹¹¹ Atul Aneja, "India, Vietnam Partners in Safeguarding Sea Lanes," *The Hindu Online*, April 15, 2000 at <http://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/2000/04/15/stories/0215000c.htm> (Accessed March 10, 2010).

¹¹² *Times of India*, April 13, 2001.

¹¹³ Manmohan Singh, "PM's Address at the Combined Commanders Conference," *Prime Minister of India: Speeches*, October 26, 2004 at <http://pmindia.nic.in/speech/content.asp?id=37> (Accessed March 10, 2010).

Conclusion

The Road Ahead – Whither Southeast Asia - India Defence Relations?

Southeast Asia-Indian defence relations have expanded markedly in the post-Cold War period, driven mainly by the increasingly convergence of their security interests. Among others, the increasingly strategic manoeuvrability of both Southeast Asia and India, and their common interest in balancing the rising power of China and the need to overcome unconventional security threats have brought Southeast Asia close to India as an important partner, against the backdrop of India's rising political and economic power. With India prepared to pay greater attention to Southeast Asia following its Look East Policy and Southeast Asia's willingness to reciprocate, especially in the context of decreasing American presence in the post-Cold War period, there has been marked progress in all-round relations between the two. This is evident in the institutionalisation of annual defence policy dialogues, broadening and deepening engagement between Southeast Asian and Indian armed forces through military exercises, Southeast Asian states, especially Singapore's access to Indian army and air force training facilities, increased cooperation on counterterrorism and piracy, collaboration between the defence industry and technology sectors and the increased security engagement of Southeast Asian states and India with third parties such as the US, Australia and Japan.

At the same time, there is greater likelihood that Southeast Asian-Indian defence relations will grow and deepen in the foreseeable future. This is due to three key factors. First, China's growing economic and military power will enhance its strategic influence in Southeast Asia, leading Southeast Asian states and India to further develop their security relationship to balance and contain China's military power. Second, India's growing political,

economic and military power creates a great incentive for Southeast Asian states to engage New Delhi to secure their diplomatic and security interests, as a hedge against reduced US strategic influence in Southeast Asia. Third, India's domestic politics is unlikely to negatively impact India's security relations with Southeast Asian states as all the major political parties in India are either neutral towards, or supportive of, improving security ties with Southeast Asian countries. This is demonstrated by the fact that Singapore signed the 2003 Defence Cooperative Agreement with the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) led government, and the 2007 "Bilateral Agreement for the Conduct of Joint Military Training and Exercises in India" with the Congress Party led government. Also, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI (M)) did not oppose the air exercises between the RSAF and IAF, even as it protested against similar exercises with the US in November 2005.¹¹⁴

Yet, at the same time, there is a need to be cautious with regard to the fast growing, Singapore-India defence ties. However, closer defence relations could be constrained by two factors. First, the 2003 DCA was signed after the then Prime Minister Vajpayee's visit to China, when India and China pledged to resolve bilateral differences peacefully.¹¹⁵ This suggests that the Singapore-India defence relationship has taken place in the context of improved Sino-Indian relations. A breakdown in those relations could cause China to regard closer defence relations between India and any Southeast Asian state, including Singapore, with suspicion, given China's dependency on oil shipments through the Malacca Strait. Beijing already has "said that while it supports efforts by the three coastal states (of Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore), individually or jointly, to safeguard the strait and counter possible terrorist threats to shipping, any outside military intervention with no

¹¹⁴ See "Kalaikunda Gets Ready to Receive F-16s Again," *Indian Express* December 23, 2005 and "CPM Nod for Air Exercises," *Statesman* January 12, 2006

¹¹⁵ S. Devare, no. 56, p. 38.

regard to the interests and sovereignty of the littoral countries, would cause great concern in Beijing.”¹¹⁶ Given their economic interests in China, Southeast Asian member-states are likely to be more cautious about closer defence cooperation with India, and resort to multilateral frameworks in order to allay concern raised by the PRC. Still, what is undeniable is that Southeast Asia-India defence cooperation has improved considerably since the end of the Cold War due to India’s desire to end its diplomatic and strategic isolation in Southeast Asia and due to ASEAN member-states’ desire to maintain a power balance in the region by engaging with the various great powers.

Despite some caution, there is a high possibility that Southeast Asia’s defence relations with India will increase in the coming years. These can evolve and expand along four main contours as follows:

1. Intensification of bilateral defence cooperation between individual Southeast Asian states and India along the lines of the Singapore-India defence relationship.
2. Intensification of ASEAN-Indian defence relations between India, and Southeast Asian states - particularly Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam and Indonesia especially to protect and secure the sea lanes of communication in the Strait of Malacca and the South China Sea.
3. Deepening of Southeast Asian-Indian relations involving the region as a whole. This is highly unlikely as Southeast Asia does not like to project itself as a military bloc even though ASEAN as a regional organisation has entered into agreement with India and other countries as far as managing terrorism is concerned. Also, if ASEAN as a collective develops close military ties with India, it is likely to provoke

¹¹⁶ Michael Richardson, “Singapore’s web of Defenses,” *The Straits Times*, March 3, 2005

China to the detriment of ASEAN's security interests, especially in the South China Sea region.

4. Deepening of ASEAN-Indian relations with third parties such as the United States, Australia and Japan will be selectively possible and likely, leading to the expansion of the *MILAN* and *Malabar* series of exercises and new ones being launched.

Whatever the combinations and matrixes that might emerge Southeast Asia -Indian defence relations have become an important aspect of the Asia-Pacific security landscape, and something that is likely to grow from strength to strength, signalling that India has emerged as a critical and integral player in Southeast Asia - in many ways, marking the return of India to Southeast Asia, where historically its was once the dominant actor.

Appendix 1

Singapore-India Military Exercises, 1993-2010

Naval Exercises : LION KING/SIMBEX

Year	Type of Exercise	Location	Vessels Involved
Feb 1993	ASW	Port Blair	2 missile corvettes, 1 submarine
Feb 1994	ASW	Indian Ocean	2 missile corvettes, 1 submarine
Jan 1995	ASW	Port Blair	2 missile corvettes, 1 submarine, 1 frigate
Mar 1996	ASW	Visakhapatnam	2 missile corvettes, 1 submarine, 1 frigate
Feb 1997	ASW	Cochin	2 missile corvettes, 1 submarine, 1 frigate
Mar 1998	ASW	Kochi	2 missile corvettes, 2 ASW Patrol Vessels, 1 submarine, 1 frigate
Mar 1999	ASW	Cochin	2 missile corvettes, 2 ASW Patrol Vessels, 1 submarine, 1 frigate
Feb 2000	ASW	Port Blair	2 missile corvettes, 2 ASW Patrol Vessels, 1 submarine, 2 frigates, helicopters
Mar 2001	ASW	Cochin	1 missile corvette, 2 ASW Patrol Vessels, 1 submarine, 1 missile frigate, 1 patrol vessel, 1 MPA
Mar 2002	ASW	Kochi	1 missile corvette, 2 ASW Patrol Vessels, 1 submarine, 1 missile frigate, 1 patrol vessel, aircraft, helicopters

Mar 2003	ASW	Kochi	2 missile corvettes, 2 ASW Patrol Vessels, 1 submarine, 1 missile frigate, 2 patrol vessels, strike aircraft, 1 MPA
Mar 2004	ASW	Kochi	2 missile corvettes, 1 ASW Patrol Vessels, 1 submarine, 1 submarine tender, 2 missile frigates, 1 patrol vessel, strike aircraft, MPA
Feb 2005	ASW, Maritime Interdiction	South China Sea	3 missile corvettes, 1 ASW Patrol Vessel, 1 submarine, 1 destroyer, 1 patrol vessel, strike aircraft
Feb 2006	ASW, Maritime Interdiction, VBSS	Visakhapatnam	4 missile corvettes, 1 ASW Patrol Vessel, 1 submarine, strike aircraft
Mar 2007	ASW, Air and Surface Interdiction	South China Sea	3 missile corvettes, 1 missile gunboat, 1 ASW Patrol Vessel, 1 submarine, 2 destroyers, strike aircraft, 1 MPA
Mar 2008	ASW, Air and Surface Interdiction	Bay of Bengal	1 landing platform dock, 1 frigate, 4 missile corvettes, 1 destroyer, 2 missile vessels, 1 submarine, 1 maritime patrol aircraft
Mar-Apr 2009	ASW, Air and Surface Interdiction	South China Sea	3 missile corvettes, 2 frigate, 2 destroyers, 1 submarine, 1 oil tanker, maritime patrol aircrafts, ship borne helicopters and strike air crafts
Apr 2010	ASW, War time strategy and war gaming	Bay of Bengal, Andaman and Nicobar Islands	1 frigate, 1 missile corvette, fast attack craft, landing ship tank, 1 destroyer, 1 submarine, 1 oil tanker, strike aircrafts.

Air Exercises : SINDEX

Year	Location	Aircraft involved
Oct 2004	Gwalior Air Force Station	6 F16C/D fighters, 2 KC-135 tankers, SU-30S, MIG-27, MIG-29, Mirage 2000 aircraft
2005	NA	
Jan 2006	Kalaikunda Air Force Station	8 F16C/D fighters, 1 KC-135 tanker
Nov 2006	Kalaikunda Air Force Station	F-16C/D fighters, MIG-27, Bison Fighter jets
Dec 2006	Paya Lebar Air Base	F-16C/D, F-5 S/T, Mirage and Jaguar Fighter
Nov-Dec 2007	Kalaikunda Air Force Station	F-5 fighters, MiG-27 ground attack fighters.
Nov-Dec 2008	Kalaikunda Air Force Station	F-16C/D, MiG-27 ground attack fighters

Armour Exercises: Bold Kurukshetra

Year	Location
Feb 2005	Babina Field Firing Range
Feb 2006	Babina Field Firing Range
Feb 2007	Babina Field Firing Range
Feb 2008	Babina Field Firing Range
Feb 2009	Babina Field Firing Range
Mar 2010	Babina Field Firing Range
Mar 2011	Babina Field Firing Range

Artillery Exercises : Agni Warrior

Year	Location	Weapons Involved
Feb 2005	Deolali Field Firing Range	FH88 155 mm guns, FH77 155mm guns
Feb 2006	Deolali Field Firing Range	FH88 155 mm guns, FH77 155mm guns
Oct 2006	Deolali Field Firing Range	FH88 155 mm guns, FH77 155mm guns
Oct 2007	Deolali Field Firing Range	FH88 155 mm guns, FH77 155mm guns
Oct 2008	Deolali Field Firing Range	FH88 155 mm guns, FH77 155mm guns
Oct 2009	Deolali Field Firing Range	FH88 155 mm guns, FH77 155mm guns

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