

India's Engagement with Southeast Asia: Evolving Contours of Defence Diplomacy

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Defence diplomacy has emerged as an important tool of military statecraft and a component of a country's soft power. A relatively new term, coined post-Cold War by the British Ministry of Defence, who defined the concept in the "Strategic Defence Review" (1998) as a "peaceful use of defences in order to achieve positive results in the development of bilateral and multilateral relations with (a) given country/ countries. The term is expansive and consolidates several peaceful and diverse activities for peacetime military cooperation such as exchange of personnel, ships and aircrafts, high-level visits, bilateral dialogues, trainings and exercises, defence forums, military assistance, confidence-building measures and non-proliferation. Anton du Plessis narrowly defined it as the "peaceful use of military personnel, including military attaches, to prevent conflicts." (Drab, 2018; Gurjar, 2023; Winger, 2014)

India, due to its geographical location in a troubled neighbourhood and dependency on weapon imports, defence diplomacy operates on two levels. The first being the strengthening of defence capabilities through diplomacy, also known as coercive defence diplomacy. The second is to undertake capacity building, military training, joint exercises and so on with relatively weaker countries of the Global South, also known as cooperative defence diplomacy. India's defence diplomacy policy includes three major components- the import of defence equipment and technologies; defence related assistance provided to friendly countries in the region; and the expansive range of activities that are now being undertaken by India's strategic establishment to protect its interests and project growing military power through growing exports of weapons systems. (Gurjar, 2023)

KEY PILLARS OF DEFENCE DIPLOMACY IN INDIA (Centre for Air Power Studies & Vohra, 2024)	
Training	Provision of professional military training to Armed Forces Personnel of Friendly Foreign Countries in Military Training Establishments
Capacity Building	Provision of assistance through grants/loans for military equipment and training

Soft Power	Projection of historical, cultural and religious linkages through initiatives such as cultural and ceremonial visits, sports, healthcare, think tank interactions and so on.
Personnel Interactions	Staff talks, security dialogues, conclaves, seminars, symposiums, subject matter expert visits hosted alternatively between India and Friendly Foreign Countries at various levels.
Exercises and Operations	Conducting Joint Bilateral/Multilateral, single Service, Bi-Service or Tri-Service exercises in the interest of knowledge dissemination and enhancing interoperability.
Defence Exports Promotions	Indigenous defence equipment and supply lines manufacture and exports.

India and Southeast Asia have had deep-rooted historical links stemming from monsoon maritime trade routes. The interaction between the two regions resulted in cultural exchanges as well as architectural, linguistic and religious influences. The earliest known Southeast Asian civilisations drew influences from Indian culture and trade. India and Southeast Asia also share a history of colonisation. During the 1870s, Southeast Asia also witnessed significant immigration of Tamils, who became indentured labourers in various British territories. Hence, there is a strong diaspora present in these countries. (Mithra, 2024; Singh, 2023) Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru organised and celebrated “Southeast Asia Day” at Lucknow in 1945. India’s policy towards Southeast Asia from its independence to the late 1950s was characterised by dynamism, empathy and solidarity with the region. The two principles that informed their policy was the erasure of colonialism and imperialism, and that no big or medium power was to dominate Southeast Asia following the inevitable power vacuum that would be left, following the withdrawal of colonial powers. India saw the struggle of Southeast Asia against colonialism in parallel with its own experiences. (Sajjanhar, 2018) But, during the Cold War era, this relationship was non-existent. India was allies with the erstwhile-Soviet Union and viewed the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)¹ as the US’ attempt to contain

¹ The Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) includes Indonesia, Singapore, Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Vietnam. It was established in 1967 with the signing of the Bangkok Declaration by Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.

communism. Several events over the course of the Cold War such as India's friendship treaty with the then-Soviet Union in 1971, criticism of US presence in Diego Garcia, India's peaceful nuclear test in 1974, as well as India's increasing military modernisation made the region even more distrustful and paranoid of India's growing security threat. In 1991, India experienced several changes that altered its international environment, economy, and national security. Indian policymakers realised the importance of engaging with regional organisations such as ASEAN. Prime Minister Narasimha Rao's visit to Southeast Asia led to India's shift in policy towards the East. The Look East Policy was launched in 1991 which improved the relationship between India and the region immensely. It was not just an economic external policy but also a strategic shift in India's position in the global economy as well as its vision for the world. In 1992, India became a Sectoral Dialogue Partner of the ASEAN, followed by full Dialogue Partner status in 1999. In 2012, to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the India-ASEAN Summit, they signed the Strategic Partnership Agreement. The Southeast Asian leaders were hesitant about creating and sustaining security ties with India, believing its military might to be a direct or indirect threat, owing to the geographic proximity of South Asia to Southeast Asia. But over the years, they have shed this reluctance and have improved their defence and military ties, either bilaterally or collectively. (Kipgen, 2020) In 2014, the Look East Policy was upgraded to Act East Policy at the 12th ASEAN-India Summit and 9th East Asia Summit. India's relation with ASEAN is the foundation of this policy. One of the prominent features of this policy includes maritime engagement in the Indo-Pacific. Furthermore, in 2019, both India and ASEAN launched their own initiatives with regards to the Indo-Pacific, Indo-Pacific Ocean's Initiative and ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific, respectively. They are distinct yet overlapping with a common aim to safeguard the region and its economic and demographic potential. India has repeatedly espoused ASEAN centrality in its Indo-Pacific Policy. (*India-ASEAN Relations*, 2018; Kalash, 2024; OBSERVER RESEARCH FOUNDATION, 2022; Singh & Marwah, 2024)

Southeast Asia holds a lot of significance for India strategic and defence policy. India aims to be the predominant power in the northeast Indian Ocean as well as to assume a strategic position in the region. This region is key for repelling threats that project from the Southeast Asian region. The Southeast Asian region is also home to key sea lines of communication such as the Malacca, Singapore and Lombok straits, and the South China Sea which are necessary for India to gain leverage, both in terms of military and economy. The region also has several

security issues which require India to step up as a key maritime security provider. India's engagement with Southeast Asia is also informed by the necessity to offset China's increasing dominance in the region, which is a shared interest. Additionally, Southeast Asia are a valuable market for defence exports as countries have expanded their defence and military spending over the last decade with many opting for medium- or long-term modernisation plans. India's partnerships with Southeast Asia are immensely crucial for creating a regional security architecture in the Indo-Pacific region. (Kalash, 2024; Prathima, 2021)

Stemming from pragmatic realism, India's defence diplomacy with Southeast Asia is based on creating and sustaining bilateral ties based on mutual trust, respect, and complementarity of capabilities. India is an important regional power given its economic, military and nuclear capacities; hence, it must use all these ties to leverage its position on the global stage. The main reason for India to pursue defence diplomacy with Southeast Asia is China's coercive and expansionist tendencies in the Indo-Pacific region, where both India and Southeast Asia have critical interests in terms of maintain a rules-based international order. In addition, India's enhanced defence relations with these countries are to acquaint the navy with the Northeastern Indian Ocean and South China Sea, where conflicts and contingencies can occur. These initiatives taken by India also exhibit the prowess and capability of its armed forces to operate effectively and efficiently in regions away from home. (Dua, 2024; Kumar, 2024; Kumar, 2011; Patil, 2022)

India's venture of sustaining resilient partnerships through defence and military mechanisms and institutions have had its successes. But, at the same time, it has its challenges due to India and Southeast Asia's diverging views on international fora. Certain Southeast Asian countries have pursued a cautiously friendly relation with China owing to its economic investments through the One Belt, One Road Initiative, which is contrary to India, who has seen deteriorating relations with the country. ASEAN's stance of nonalignment and aversion to great power competition has also created hesitation as India is involved with QUAD. Furthermore, India's defence manufacturing and industry is nascent which casts doubt on the extent and ability of India to carve a niche for itself in the region's defence and security architecture as an arms provider. (Bhardwaj, 2024; Shantanu Roy-Chaudhury, 2025; Solanki, 2024)

India's maritime and defence cooperation with Southeast Asia is central in its ambition to become a regional power and net security provider. While countering China's assertiveness,

India aims to position itself as a reliable and capable partner. Enhancing interoperability against a common security concern is essential towards creating an enduring security relationship. To ensure the continuing success of this endeavour, India needs to ensure that its defence industry has the ability to bridge the existing gap in the region. Additionally, it needs to balance its relations with ASEAN and Great Powers such as US to meet common ground while satisfying its own strategic interests. India's approach towards Southeast Asia in creating a rules-based global order, hence, must be dynamic, proactive and consistent to be mutually beneficial.

Mapping India's Defence Cooperation with Southeast Asia

Defence diplomacy forms one of the most important components of India's relation with Southeast Asia and ASEAN. Since the launch of the Look East Policy in 1992, India engagements with Southeast Asia in terms of defence and security have accelerated. But defence diplomacy has been underreported due to confidentiality in defence matters. India engages both bilaterally with each state as well as multilaterally with the entire region.

BRUNEI DARUSSALAM	
MoUs and Agreements	2003- MoU on Defence Cooperation focusing on training, visits and exchanges. Renewed for five years in 2021. Implementing Arrangement (IA) for cooperation in defense research is being explored under the MoU (pending with DRDO).
Joint Exercises	No bilateral exercises as of 2025
Training and Capacity Building	Three officers of the Royal Brunei Armed Forces attended the senior officers' course at the National Defence College (NDC) of India in 2001, 2009 and 2014
High Level Official Visits	From Brunei 2016-Deputy Minister of Defence, First Admiral (Rtd) Dato Abdul Aziz attended the Defexpo India 2019- Major General Pehin Dato Paduka Seri Aminan, Commander of Royal Brunei Armed Forces visited India and held meetings with Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee, Air Marshal Birender Singh Dhanoa, Chief of Army Staff,

	General Bipin Rawat and Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral Karambir Singh. From India 2017- Sixteen-member delegation led by Major General Sunil Srivastava from National Defence College visits Brunei 2019- Indian Navy Commodore Prakash Ayyangari and Commodore Venkatesh Prabhu visit Brunei to attend the Western Pacific Naval Symposium.
Defence Attache Deployment	Colonel S. Praveen- Based at High Commission of India, Kuala Lumpur

(*High Commission of India, Brunei Darussalam: High Commission Officials, 2024; High Commission of India, Brunei Darussalam: India-Brunei Bilateral Brief, 2025*)

CAMBODIA	
MoUs and Agreements	2007- MoU on Defence Cooperation 2023- MoU for Naval Cooperation
Joint Exercises	CINBAX
Training and Capacity Building	Conduct of annual training capsule for Royal Cambodian Armed Forces in Peacekeeping and Demining modules Defence courses under ITEC 2025- Gifted fifteen sniffer dogs for demining and Infantry Weapons Training Simulator donated
High Level Official Visits	From Cambodia 2023- Lieutenant General Hun Manet, Deputy Commander in Chief of Royal Cambodian Armed Forces and Commander of Royal Cambodian Army visited India. A number of high-level interactions took place during the visit including the Vice President Shri Jagdeep Dhankhar, External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar, and Shri Rajnath Singh, Minister of Defence. He also had meetings with Chief of Defence Staff, Defence Secretary, and Deputy National Security Adviser.

		From India 2022- Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh visited Siem Reap, Cambodia
Defence Deployment	Attache	Col. S. Muthukrishnan- Based in Hanoi

(Brief on India-Cambodia Bilateral Relations, 2025; India Donates Infantry Weapon Training Simulator to Royal Cambodian Army | India's World, 2025; Welcome to Embassy of India, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 2024)

INDONESIA		
MoUs and Agreements		2018- Shared Vision of India-Indonesia on Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific 2025- Defence Cooperation Agreement 2025- MoU on Maritime Safety and Security Cooperation renewed
Joint Exercises		Samudra Shakti; Garuda Shakti; Ind-Indo CORPAT; Komodo
Training and Capacity Building		Cadet exchanges between Naval Academies and National Defence University/Academy Navy to Navy Talks In lieu of the White Shipping Information Exchange (WSIE) agreement, India agreed to position an International Liaison Officer (ILO) from Indonesia at Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean region (IFC-IOR) Gurugram. Specialised courses by the National Security Guard (NSG) of India for Counterterrorism
High Level Official Visits		From India 2012- Raksha Mantri visited Indonesia as part of the biennial dialogue between the two Defence Ministers agreed during President Yudhoyono's visit to India in 2011. The Third Joint Defence Cooperation Committee was held in Jakarta preceding RM's meeting.

		2024- India's Chief of Naval Staff, Dinesh Kumar Tripathi, visits Jakarta.
Defence Deployment	Attache	Capt. Shiv Kumar

(Embassy of India, Jakarta, n.d.; *Consulate General of India, Bali, Indonesia: India and Indonesia Bilateral Brief*, 2024; External Affairs, 2025; *ICG and Indonesian Coast Guard Renew MoU for Another Three Years*, 2017)

LAOS PDR		
MoUs and Agreements		2024- MoU on Defence
Joint Exercises		None
Training and Capacity Building		<p>A nine-member youth delegation from various universities and academic institutions of Lao PDR and four representatives of Ministry of Education and Sports of Lao PDR visited India to attend the National Cadet Corps - Youth Exchange Programme from 15-29 January 2024 and Republic Day Functions.</p> <p>Under Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme, a two-member Indian Army Training Team (IATT) conducts training for Lao defence personnel in English, Computers and Basic Tactics.</p> <p>The Indian Army had also conducted three training capsules on Unexploded Ordnances and Dlaose-Mining in Lao PDR in 2011, 2012 and 2013</p> <p>Under ITEC programme, 7 officers from Lao PDR medical military department participated in the first Cambodia Lao PDR Myanmar Vietnam e-ITEC defence medical course on COVID-19 in 2020.</p>
High Level Official Visits		2024- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh attends the ADMM+ meeting in Vientiane.
Defence Deployment	Attache	Colonel Dheeraj Kotwal

(Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 2024*List of Outcomes: Visit of Prime Minister to Vientiane, Lao PDR (October 10 -11, 2024)*, 2024)

MALAYSIA		
MoUs, Agreements, Meetings and Dialogues		MoU on Defence Cooperation- signed in 1993 and amended in 2023 India-Malaysia Defence Cooperation Meeting (MIDCOM) 2025- first India-Malaysia Security Dialogue
Joint Exercises		Samudra Laksamana; Harimau Shakti; Udara Shakti
Training and Capacity Building		Regular staff talks between services. Malaysian officers regularly attend the Defence Services Staff College (DSSC) Course, the National Defence College (NDC) Course and several other specialized courses in India. 2008, India accepted Malaysia's request to train the Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF) personnel on the operation and maintenance of the state of art Su-30 MKM aircraft. There is regular exchange of courses at functional and higher levels, including training on UN Peace Keeping Operations.
High Level Official Visits		2023- Defence Minister of India, Shri Rajnath Singh paid an official visit to Malaysia
Defence Attache Deployment		Colonel Praveen Sukumaran

(*Defence Co-Operation | Welcome to High Commission of India, Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia)*, 2015; *First India-Malaysia Security Dialogue*, 2025; *INDIA-MALAYSIA BILATERAL RELATIONS*, n.d.; *Officers & Functional Contacts | Official Website of High Commission of India, Kuala Lumpur Malaysia, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India.*, 2023)

MYANMAR		
MoUs and Agreements		MoU on Defence Cooperation and Border Area Management- 2014 MoU on enhanced maritime cooperation- 2017 Regional Border Committee Meeting
Joint Exercises		IMBEX; IMCOR; IN-MN BILAT

Training and Capacity Building	Training facilities to Myanmar armed forces in professional and technical courses; the vacancies in such courses for the Myanmar defence forces are being regularly enhanced. Maintenance of some Russian origin equipment is also being provided by the Indian defence forces.
High Level Official Visits	<p>From India</p> <p>National Security Advisor visited Myanmar on 16 June, 2016 as Special Envoy of Prime Minister.</p> <p>Deputy National Security Advisor visited Myanmar on 17 January 2020.</p> <p>Defence Secretary, Shri Sanjay Mitra visited Myanmar in May 2019</p> <p>Vice Chief of Naval Staff, Vice Admiral G Ashok Kumar visited Myanmar in October 2019. Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Karambir Singh visited Myanmar from 17-20 February 2020.</p> <p>Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh met Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing (Sr. Gen.MAH) on 24 June 2020 on the sidelines of Russia's Victory Day Parade in Moscow. Chief of Army Staff General M M Naravane visited Myanmar in October 2020.</p> <p>From Myanmar</p> <p>Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, Commander-in-Chief of the Defense Forces of Myanmar visited India in July 2019.</p> <p>Vice-Senior General Soe Win,</p> <p>Deputy Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services visited India in February 2020 to attend DefExpo 2020.</p>
Defence Attache Deployment	Colonel Jaswinder Singh Gill

(Anand, 2020; *India-Myanmar -Bilateral Brief*, n.d.; *Myanmar, India Armed Forces Boost Friendship and Cooperation* | Ministry of Information, 2025)

PHILIPPINES	
MoUs and Agreements	2006- Defence Cooperation Agreement 2017- MoU on Defence Industry and Logistics Cooperation Joint Defence Cooperation Committee 2023- MOU on Enhanced Maritime Cooperation and Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to operationalize the MoU on exchange of White Shipping Information (2019) Joint Defence Industry and Logistics Committee Service to Service Meetings the Inaugural India-PH Track-1 Maritime Dialogue held in Manila in Dec 2024
Joint Exercises	Maritime Partnership Exercise
Training and Capacity Building	2023- 21 Philippine Navy officers underwent training on the operation and maintenance of the missile systems, equipping them with essential skills to manage and deploy the advanced technology effectively. (BrahMos missile)
High Level Official Visits	2024: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh meets his Philippines counterpart, Gilberto Teodoro, on the sidelines of the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meet in Vientiane.
Defence Attache Deployment	Captain ChandraKant Kothari

(Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 2025; *Embassy of India, Manila, Philippines*, 2024; ET Online, 2025; JUser::_load, 2012)

SINGAPORE	
MoUs and Agreements	Defence Cooperation Agreement (2003, renewed 2017) Cooperation Agreement 2017 Training Pact 2024 Defence Policy Dialogue Defence Ministers' Dialogue
Joint Exercises	Agni Warrior; SIMBEX; Joint Military Training; SITMEX
Training and Capacity Building	Training exchanges under joint exercises

High Level Official Visits	Chief of Naval Staff Admiral R Hari Kumar visited Singapore in May 2023. 2024: 6 th India-Singapore Defence Ministers' Dialogue held in New Delhi, with Minister of Defence Rajnath Singh and his Singaporean counterpart leading their respective delegations.
Defence Attache Deployment	Captain Sandeep N. Marathe

(Embassy of India, Singapore, n.d.)

THAILAND	
MoUs and Agreements	MoU on Defence Cooperation between India and Thailand was signed on 25 January 2012. India-Thailand Defence Dialogue Joint Working Group on Security Cooperation Joint Task Force (JTF) on Maritime Cooperation, in 2021
Joint Exercises	SITMEX; Exercise Ayutthaya; Indo-Thai CORPAT; Maitree
Training and Capacity Building	First Training Squadron Visit
High Level Official Visits	Chief of Defence Force of Royal Thai Armed Forces General Songwit Noonpackdee paid an official visit to India from 21-24 January 2025.
Defence Attache Deployment	Gp Capt Ashish Tirkha

(INDIA- THAILAND JOINT MILITARY EXERCISE MAITREE 2024 - UPDATE, 2024; Welcome to Embassy of India, Bangkok - Thailand, 2022)

TIMOR LESTE	
MoUs and Agreements	None
Joint Exercises	None
Training and Capacity Building	ITEC Training slots have been created for the Armed Forces Personnel

High Level Official Visits	Navy Component Commander of Timor Leste led a delegation to India to attend Aero India 2025 Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh met Timorese Defence Minister at ADMM-Plus in Jakarta
Defence Attache Deployment	Captain Shiv Kumar Based at Embassy of India, Jakarta

(Embassy Officers | Embassy of India, Dili, Timor Leste, 2025; India-Timor Leste: Bilateral Relations | Embassy of India, Dili, Timor Leste, 2025)

VIETNAM	
MoUs and Agreements	Memorandum of Understanding on Defence Cooperation signed between the Ministries of Defence in 2009 and the Joint Vision on Defence Cooperation signed by the Defence Ministers in 2015 June 2022, the two sides concluded a new "Joint Vision Statement on India-Viet Nam Defence Partnership towards 2030" and signed a "Memorandum of Understanding on Mutual Logistics Support". India-Viet Nam Maritime Security Dialogue Annual Defence Policy Dialogue Security Dialogue
Joint Exercises	VINBAX; India-Vietnam Air Cooperation
Training and Capacity Building	military-to-military staff talks, defence exercises, training, ship and aircraft visits and other exchanges
High Level Official Visits	National Security Adviser (NSA), Mr. Ajit Doval visited Vietnam from 24-25 July 2024 for state funeral of Party General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong. NSA met President Dr. To Lam and Prime Minister Mr. Pham Minh Chinh in Hanoi. Minister of National Defence General Phan Van Giang to India (June 2023), Minister of Public Security of Viet Nam General To Lam to India (April 2023).

		2022, Raksha Mantri (Defence Minister) Mr. Rajnath Singh and Secretary (East) Mr. Saurabh Kumar visited Viet Nam and from Viet Nam side.
Defence Deployment	Attache	Colonel S. Muthukrishnan

(*Embassy of India, Hanoi, Vietnam: Bilateral Relations*, n.d.; *Embassy of India, Hanoi, Vietnam: Embassy Officers*, 2025)

The ASEAN-India Maritime Exercise (AIME) was co-hosted by the Republic of Singapore Navy and the Indian Navy. It was held from 2nd to 8th May 2023 in Singapore. The exercise consisted of a Harbour Phase (Changi Naval Base) and a Sea Phase (South China Sea). India's indigenously designed and built ships- destroyer INS Delhi and stealth frigate INS Satpura, maritime patrol aircraft P8I and integral helicopters exercised with ASEAN naval ships from Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam and Singapore. Laos and Cambodia did not participate. The sea phase consisted of tactical manoeuvres, cross deck landings by helicopters, seamanship evolutions and other maritime operations. The harbour phase included a range of professional and social interactions between the participating navies which includes cross deck visits, Subject Matter Expert Exchanges SMEE and planning meetings. The ships also participated in International Maritime Defence Exhibition (IMDEX-23) and the International Maritime Security Conference. India and ASEAN engage in a number of forums, regional groups, and different platforms to ensure maritime cooperation between India and Southeast Asian countries. ASEAN itself has many forums such as the India-ASEAN Summit, ASEAN Defence Minister Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus), ASEAN Regional Forum and Expanded Maritime Forum, ASEAN Region Forum Inter-Sessional Meeting on Maritime Security. India and Southeast Asian countries also engage in a number of consultative meetings such as the East Asia Summit, Shangri-La dialogue, the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium, the Post Ministerial Conference (PMC) 10+1. (Nachiappan, 2021) India's flagship MILAN exercise, started in the 1990s, includes a number of ASEAN countries. It is held biennially at Port Blair. It began with Indonesia, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Thailand as inaugural members. It used to be conducted in the Western Naval Command but since 2021, has shifted to the Eastern Naval Command. It consists of Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, Myanmar, Philippines,

Brunei, Malaysia and Vietnam. MILEX includes Myanmar and Thailand. SITMEX includes Thailand and Singapore.

India's experience in disaster relief cooperation with Southeast Asia can be traced back to the 1990s with the Look East Policy. Following the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, India conducted one of the largest multinational HADR operations, in which the navy played an important role. The Indian Navy is an indispensable tool in the arsenal of India's defence diplomacy. The rationale behind providing HADR is multifaceted. India can address immediate crises and long-term stability of the region by providing timely and well-coordinated humanitarian aid. HADR efforts are an extension of foreign policy, which solidifies India's image as a compassionate and responsible global actor. India can also strengthen bilateral ties while contributing to the resilience of the country to deal with subsequent disasters. With regards to disaster relief with Southeast Asian countries, India has focused on not only post-disaster relief and rescue cooperation but also disaster preparedness and management through bilateral and multilateral exercises. Another strength of India's HADR cooperation with Southeast Asia is that India adheres to the rules and norms of engagement of the country affected by the disaster. It does not favour the Responsibility to Protect Approach, rather it focuses on capacity building and closed-door diplomacy. For instance, during Cyclone Nargis in 2008, Myanmar rejected international aid, but India sought to accommodate its interests. ((National Disaster Management Authority, 2024; India's Evolving Disaster Relief Cooperation, n.d.) The most recent is Operation Brahma, launched by the Government of India, rendered assistance to Myanmar in the aftermath of the earthquakes. Indian Navy ships INS Satpura and INS Savitri, from the Eastern Naval Command, sailed on 29th March 2025. Additionally, INS Karmuk and LCU 52 from the Andaman and Nicobar Command on 30th March 2025. Approximately fifty-two tons of relief material was transported through these ships. (PIB, 2025)

Southeast Asia sees India as a key actor in maintaining the regional equilibrium. On the other hand, India intends to bolster the defence and military capabilities of Southeast Asia to close the growing asymmetry with China. Engagements are just not symbolic but strategic to ensure that the rules-based international order is maintained. The shift from reactive to proactive defence diplomacy has reinforced its image as a responsible power, net security provider and first responder in the region. India has to further diversify its defence diplomacy with Southeast Asia to ensure that the security architecture remains intact and mutually beneficial.

The Defence Industry and Tech Diplomacy in Enhancing India's Cooperation with Southeast Asia

The defence sector and industry of India has undergone tremendous changes over the last decade. The Indian military force has shifted from largely import dependent to self-reliance and indigenous production. As one of the largest and strongest military powers across the globe, it is imperative for India to further strengthen their defence capabilities and manufacturing sector, in the interest of regional security and strategic goals. Through the “Make in India” initiative, the Indian government is actively promoting indigenisation of production while reducing reliance on foreign procurement. It is an essential step taken towards the nation’s overall goal of “Atmanirbharta” in defence. India’s budget for defence has seen a significant rise from 2013-14 (₹2.53,345 crore) to 2024-25 (₹6,21,940.85 crore). Additionally, India’s defence exports have increased from ₹1941 crore in 2014-15 to ₹23,622 crore in 2024-25.(PIB Delhi, 2025a, 2025b) India has incorporated defence exports and technology transfers into its foreign policy arsenal. It is a strategic defence diplomacy tool to exert diplomatic influence and create security alliances. Defence exports are also immensely beneficial for the economy as India is trying to become an economic powerhouse. India is the fourth largest and fastest growing major economy with a projected GDP of 7.3 billion dollars by 2030. (Mehdi, 2025)

Southeast Asia is located in a crucial geostrategic position in the Indo-Pacific arena, hence, its military power is a crucial necessity for the security of the individual countries and the region as a whole. The region houses some crucial sea lines of communication (SLOCs) and chokepoints that are indispensable for the global economy and regional security. China is highly reliant on the Malacca Strait for energy and trade, leading to the “Malacca Dilemma”. The Southeast Asian region, particularly the South China Sea, is susceptible to territorial disputes and great power rivalries. To address their diverse security concerns, Southeast Asian countries have undertaken military modernisation. The demand for defence equipment and arms is a lucrative avenue for extra-regional powers to exert their influence. The lack of defence industries makes Southeast Asia highly reliant on other countries to supply its defence needs. Much of their defence budget in maintaining large armies and old arsenal, as well as addressing non-traditional threats. The funding of Research and Development is severely constrained as a result. (Wu, 2024)

India's aspirations of becoming a major exporter and favourable relations with Southeast Asian nations, make Southeast Asia a potential market for Indian defence exports. India has adopted a policy of restricting lethal weapons exports to other countries. Additionally, India is also looking forward to promoting and creating partnerships with Southeast Asia's defence industry. One way to do this is by creating the initial platform in the shipyards of Southeast Asian countries themselves and integrating the electronics and navigational panels in Indian shipyards later. India's defence industry has done well for itself. For instance, the construction of fast crafts by Larsen & Toubro for Vietnam, which includes state-of-the-art systems such as pyrotechnic signalling devices. By developing their defence production network, India's private sector can gain access to this highly profitable segment. (M. Mayilvaganan, 2021; Sahu, 2025)

INDIA'S DEFENCE EXPORTS TO MYANMAR

(Arms Transfer Database, n.d.)

Designation (Number ordered)	Weapon Category	Description	Order Year/Delivery Year
Mi-8T (2)	Aircraft	Transport Helicopter	1999/2000
Aditya (10)	Armoured Vehicle	Armoured Personnel Carrier	2006/2006
BN-2 Islander (2)	Aircraft	Light Transport Aircraft	2005/2006
T-55 (10)	Armoured Vehicle	Tank	2006/2006
Light Gun 105mm (10)	Artillery	Towed Gun	2006/2006
BN-2 Maritime (5)	Aircraft	Maritime Patrol Aircraft	2007/2008
LW-04 (1)	Sensors	Air-Search Radar	2006/2013
HMS-X (3)	Sensors	Anti-Submarine Sonar	2013/2015
LW-04 (1)	Sensors	Air-Search Radar	2011/2016
LW-04 (3)	Sensors	Air-Search Radar	2013/2016
Project-877E (1)	Ships	Submarines	2019/2020
Shyena (20)	Missiles	Anti-Submarine Torpedo	2017/2020
Revathi	Sensors	Air-Search Radar	2022/2023

India's defence cooperation with Myanmar is aimed at better border management by curbing north-eastern insurgents and The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) places India as one of the top five arms sellers to the Myanmar military. Starting from 2003, India has transferred eighty units of 75mm howitzer guns to Myanmar. India has also supplied other military equipment to Myanmar's armed forces such as mortars, rocket launchers, radars, rifles and night-vision devices. In 2017, India and Myanmar signed a deal worth US\$37.9 million for the export of the Shyena missile, developed by the Defence Research and

Development Organisation (DRDO) and manufactured by Larsen & Toubro and Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL). In 2018, India announced that it would donate six HJT-Kiran jet trainers manufactured by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited as well as station a special team to assist pilots and ground crew. In 2019, as a counter to Chinese military hardware, India gifted Myanmar, INS Sindhuvir, a Kilo class submarine which was renamed UMS Minye Theinkhathu. It was refurbished and modernised in Vishakhapatnam by Hindustan Shipyard Limited. (Azman Ayob, 2023; Routray, 2019)

INDIA'S DEFENCE EXPORTS TO PHILIPPINES			
Designation (Number ordered)	Weapon Category	Description	Order Year/Delivery Year
NGMMCB (3)	Artillery	Coastal Defence System	2022
BrahMos NAVAL (60)	Missiles	Anti-Ship/Land-attack Missile	2022/2025

The Philippines is located at the junction of the South China Sea, the Indonesian archipelago, and the Western Pacific Ocean, which makes it vital for the Indo-Pacific. India's US\$375 million deal with Philippines involves the export of the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile.

INDIA'S DEFENCE EXPORTS TO SINGAPORE			
Designation (Number ordered)	Weapon Category	Description	Order Year/Delivery Year
AMX-13-75 (150)	Armoured Vehicle	Light Tank	1972/1975
Centurion-3 (24)	Armoured Vehicle	Tank	1975/1975

India is supplying missiles to a country that is in territorial dispute with China. This would ensure that smaller countries would employ their anti-access/area denial strategy against China. Further, this was India's first major sale of indigenously produced equipment. (Don McLain Gill, 2023; Parameswaran, 2019; Rajagopalan, 2022)

Though India shares a robust defence relationship with Singapore, defence exports have been extremely limited. In fact, there have been no exports since 1975. India is exploring avenues for potential arms development collaboration, but it remains to be seen.

INDIA'S DEFENCE EXPORTS TO VIETNAM			
Designation (Number ordered)	Weapon Category	Description	Order Year/Delivery Year
Kirpan (1)	Ship	Corvette	2023/2023

Since 2016, India and Vietnam have discussed the possibility of sale of the Akash surface-to-air missile system, under the US\$500 million Line of Credit. Owing to ninety-six per cent indigenisation, India can freely transfer this system to Vietnam. Vietnam is also interested in the procurement of the indigenously developed Dhruv light helicopter. India has also extended the offer to sell the Varunastra anti-submarine torpedo. In 2018, India was also set to assist Vietnam in weaponizing two of its Petya class frigates.(Solanki, 2021) In 2021, Vietnam used the US\$100 million Defence Line of Credit, previously extended by India in to construct twelve High Speed Guard Boats. Five boats were built by M/s Larsen &Toubro (L&T) in India and the rest in Hing Ha Shipyard Company in Vietnam.(*Embassy of India, Hanoi, Vietnam : Press Releases*, n.d.) On April 17th, 2025, a deal valued at nearly ₹5,990 crore was signed between Vietnam and India for the acquisition of the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile. (admin, 2025)

India has tried to negotiate agreements with regard to the BrahMos missile with Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia. Malaysia, Indonesia and Philippines have shown interest in acquiring the Light Combat Aircraft Tejas. In 2022, Larsen and Toubro secured a contract to deliver the Teevra-40 to the Indonesian Navy. (Bhosale, 2023)

There is a myriad of challenges that India is facing in becoming a major arms exporter. One of the most pressing concerns is the Research and Development gap. India is lacking in terms of a strong R&D programme that can foster dual usage of technology advancement. While the DRDO is doing well with the resources at its disposal, there is an urgent need for India to step up its R&D in defence. There is a need to review DRDO's internal mechanism to ensure there are no delays and cost overruns. India is also lacking capacity in terms of developing of fully indigenous defence equipments and arms due to its dependency on electronics and semiconductors from foreign sources. Lengthy defence procurement cycles and delays in

finalising defence contracts have significant implications for both project execution and investment. The procurement process is delayed by bureaucratic hurdles, approvals, and slow decision-making, which results in extended timelines for acquiring essential defence equipment, impacting operational readiness. Ensuring compliance with competitiveness is difficult for India to navigate. Both India and Southeast Asia also lack the funds in their foreign reserves for military modernisation. Geopolitical issues impact India's defence export potential. Southeast Asian nations, having established defence ties with other powerful nations such as China and US, have experienced issues with establishing relations with India, as they have to strategically balance these relationships. (*India's Defence Manufacturing Ecosystem: Between Ambition and Execution – SPRF, 2025; Verma & ET Government, 2025*)

India has emerged as a global technology powerhouse owing to its robust policy reforms and infrastructure. Technology has increasingly become a tool of geopolitics and international relations, taking the form of technology diplomacy. India's vision for technology diplomacy includes its rise as a leader in the sustainable global digitised future, advocating for standards for AI and data governance. Cybersecurity is a shared concern of India and Southeast Asia as Southeast Asia becomes increasingly prone to cyber-attacks and information leaks. India has expanded cyber and digital technology cooperation with Southeast Asia. The first ASEAN-India Track 1.5 Dialogue on cyber issues was held in New Delhi in 2019. It comprised various stakeholders from the India's Ministry of External Affairs and also IT experts of the corresponding countries. Discussions featured data protection and governance, cybersecurity laws, and tendencies in cybersecurity in the region. The second session was conducted virtually in 2020, co-organised by ORF and the MEA. In 2024, the India-Singapore Policy Dialogue was established. Its first session was held in October and addressed digital security challenges, exchanged threat assessments, and developed collaborative responses to cyber threats. During the Malaysian Prime Minister, Anwar Ibrahim's maiden visit, an agreement on digital public infrastructure sharing was signed. Additionally, India has also advocated for responsible governance in emerging fields of technology such as artificial intelligence, data protection and critical information infrastructure with Southeast Asia. The India-Singapore Ministerial Roundtable also discussed technological developments and digital standards. Through technology diplomacy, India aims to leverage its own capacities while aiding Southeast Asia in responding to China's looming influence. (Rai, 2025)

India has a large growing ecosystem of emerging technologies that combine defence and technology. These include AI for defence-related applications, quantum resilient communication, autonomous defence technologies and systems, electronic warfare and so on. “Acing Development of Innovative Technologies with iDEX” (ADITI), a scheme within iDEX, aims to support critical and strategic technologies like satellite communication, advanced cyber technology, autonomous weapons, semiconductors, AI, quantum technology, nuclear technologies, and underwater surveillance. (Mishra, 2025)

As India pursues self-reliance, it is also rising as a credible defence exporter and technological leader. The shifter for defence importer to arms supplier has been transformed by reforms in its defence industry. Southeast Asia is vital for India’s ambitions as they both share regional security concerns in the wider Indo-Pacific region. Despite successes with countries like Vietnam and the Philippines, India has a long way to go to position itself as a reliable and capable partner. In addition to defence exports, India’s pursuit of technology diplomacy has widened its scope of foreign engagements. Though constraints exist, this can be remedied through intensifying defence-industrial collaboration with the region. India must also bridge the gap in its Research and Development. Additionally, it may extend Lines of Credit to less advanced countries in the Southeast Asian region to encourage exports. By doing so, India can ensure a more secure and stable Indo-Pacific order while maintaining its position as a regional security provider.

India and Southeast Asia’s Shared Vision for the Indo-Pacific

The Indo-Pacific is a biogeographical zone that combines both the Indian and Pacific Ocean. It is an emerging geostrategic and geoeconomic concept with immense importance in the fields of defence and security. It is a key arena for global political and economic stability as the region accounts for 60% of the world’s GDP and two-thirds of its economic growth. It also houses 60% of the global population, adding on to its geopolitical relevance. India is undeniably a significant player in the Indo-Pacific region in the 21st century, given its strategic geographical position and robust economic and military strength. It is the maritime trade highway of the world. It combines the Southeast Asian states with the western Pacific, which is littered with key sea lines of communication such as the Straits of Malacca, Sunda, Lombok and Makassar. The Southeast Asian region is critical for trade and energy transfers. (Rajesh, 2016)

The geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific is characterised by competition for strategic resources and locations, freedom of navigation, and arms races, along with non-traditional security challenges. India’s

geographical location and rising economic and political status have given it an edge in the Indo-Pacific region, making it a undeniably powerful player. The Indo-Pacific is the epicentre for shift in the global power equation. The concept of the Indo-Pacific invokes different meanings for different states. Major Powers like US seek to maintain the status quo whereas states like China, aided by the One Belt, One Road initiative, seeks to disrupt the order. Apart from these countries, India and Southeast Asia are also trying to be part of the balance of power. They advocate for a free and open Indo-Pacific. The region is also faced with the threat of nuclear proliferation and build up, as all nuclear weapon states are either located here or have a regular military presence here. The region, hence, becomes a zone of immense contestation. While traditional rivalries over territory, sovereignty, and resources remain constant, non-traditional issues such as piracy, terrorism, drug trafficking, IUU fishing and climate change are on the rise. The threat posed to the stability of the region emanates from various sources, making it vital for maritime security forces to quell them. Many of these issues are transnational in nature requiring the cooperation of the nations present in the region. Several institutional arrangements have come up to address economic and security issues in the region. Nations are collaborating either through bilateral interactions or multilateral arrangements, to build up their capacities to address these issues. The Trans-Pacific Partnership and the QUAD are key frameworks in the region that address the economy and security respectively. Even for China to have full control over the region, cooperation with other stake holding countries is necessary. (Alberque, 2023; Bishoyi, 2015; Krishnan, 2020; Rajesh, 2016; Tripathy, 2025)

India and Southeast Asia, particularly the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, cooperate extensively in terms of the Indo-Pacific. India's willingness to engage with Southeast Asian countries can be traced to its concern with China's amplifying influence over the region which has severe consequences for India's freedom of navigation and free trade. Prime Minister Modi announced the new "Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative" in 2019 at the East Asia Summit in Bangkok. It builds on the previous "Security and Growth For All in the Region" (SAGAR) framework, which talked about advancing cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region to ensure prosperity and security for all through orderly and sustainable use of ocean resources.

The IPOI consists of seven areas of practical cooperation- (i) Maritime Security; (ii) Maritime Ecology; (iii) Maritime Resources; (iv) Capacity Building and Resource Sharing; (v) Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (vi) Science, Technology and Academic Cooperation; and (vii) Trade, Connectivity and Maritime Transport. India's vision for the Indo-Pacific espouses a free, open, inclusive, rule-based order that respects territorial integrity and sovereignty. They also emphasise respect for international law by upholding principles of freedom of navigation and overflight, unimpeded flow of lawful commerce and peaceful settlement of disputes. (ICWA, n.d.)

The IPOI emphasises the centrality of ASEAN. (ICWA, n.d.) The ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific asserts that ASEAN is central to the Indo-Pacific region. It promotes dialogue and cooperation over rivalry as well as inclusive development and prosperity for all. Additionally, it also espouses the importance of a rules-based order and respect for sovereignty. Inclusivity, openness and transparency are important principles. Most importantly, they view the Indo-Pacific as a closely integrated and interconnected region. It also sees the importance of maritime domain and perspective in the evolving regional architecture. (ASEAN, 2021)

The IPOI and AOIP have considerable overlap. The ASEAN-India Joint Statement on Cooperation on the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific for Peace, Stability, and Prosperity in the Region notes that both the AOIP and IPOI share relevant fundamental principles in promoting peace and cooperation. Only one of the twenty-one specific activities is security related and refers to efforts to counter piracy, armed robbery against ships, maritime safety, and search and rescue operations. (OBSERVER RESEARCH FOUNDATION, 2022)

There is a strong security dimension to India's approach to the Indo-Pacific Ocean which includes both traditional and non-traditional naval considerations. The Indian Navy is predicted to become the key maritime security provider in the region. (Jaishankar, 2016) India's naval capabilities had been severely restrained until the end of the Cold War as policymakers were more concerned with safeguarding land frontiers than the sea. Despite being the Cinderella service, the Indian navy has been undergoing modernisation and expansion which include substantial investment in capital assets, development of indigenous capabilities, coastal shipping, and economic use of offshore islands and so on. It can project power to distant parts of the Indian Ocean Region and Pacific only in cooperation with friendly nations. THE Indian Navy has been mandated as the net security provider. (Gupta, 2024) The Indian Navy is highly important in India's endeavour to expand its strategic footprint in Southeast Asia. The Indian Navy does this by initiating joint exercises, training programmes, increasing the intensity of naval port calls and coordinated patrols, and extending jointly developed defence systems to key partners in Southeast Asia. Doing so benefits India's defence exports and also helps develop information sharing mechanisms to help better understand and petrol the expanse of the Indo-Pacific region. Increasing interoperability through joint exercises and training also helps develop lasting security relations with the Southeast Asian region. (Suri, 2023)

Table 4: Identified Broad-Areas of (Maritime) Cooperation

Sectors	ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP)	Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI)
Maritime Cooperation	Freedom of Navigation and Overflight	Maritime Security
	Peaceful Dispute-settlement	Capacity Building and Resource Sharing
	Promote Maritime Connectivity	
	Maritime Safety & Security	
	Promote Maritime Commerce	
	Address Transnational Crime (e.g., trafficking in persons or illicit drugs, sea-piracy, robbery and armed robbery against ships at sea, etc.)	
	Develop a Blue Economy	Maritime Resources
	Sustainable Management of Marine Resources	Capacity Building and Resource Sharing
	Address Marine Pollution	
	Mitigate impacts of Sea-level Rise	
	Tackle Marine Debris	Maritime Ecology
	Preserve and Protect the Marine Environment and Biodiversity	
	Promote 'Green' Shipping,	
	Protect the Livelihood of Coastal Communities	Capacity Building and Resource Sharing
	Support Small-scale Fishing Communities	
	Technical Cooperation in Marine Science Collaboration (R & D; sharing of experience and best practices, capacity-building, managing marine hazards, raising awareness on marine and ocean-related issues, etc.)	Science, Technology and Academic Cooperation
Connectivity (Connecting the Connectivities)	Reinforce existing MPAC 2025	Trade Connectivity and Maritime Transport
	Mobilise resources for connectivity projects via regional public-private partnerships (PPP)	Capacity Building and Resource Sharing
	Promote regional public-private partnerships (PPP) for infrastructure projects	
	Explore potential synergies with sub-regional frameworks (e.g., IORA, BIMSTEC, BIMP-EAGA, MGC, ACMECS, etc.)	
	People-to-people connectivity (including academia and business communities)	
UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030	Utilization of the digital economy	IPOI's underpinning as a whole
	Align regional development with the SDGs	
Economic and Other Areas of Cooperation	Trade Facilitation and Logistics Infrastructure and Services	Trade Connectivity and Maritime Transport
		Capacity Building and Resource Sharing
	Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction and Management	Disaster Risk Reduction and Management
	Maritime Implications of Industrial Revolution 4.0	

Source: Chauhan (2020)

Joint Naval Exercises carried out by Indian Navy	
IND-INDO CORPAT	Indonesia

SAMUDRA SHAKTI	Indonesia
IN-MN Table Top Exercise	Malaysia
PASSEX	Malaysia
IMCOR	Myanmar
IN-MN BILAT	Myanmar
SIMBEX	Singapore
INDO-THAI CORPAT	Thailand
Maritime Partnership Exercise	Philippines
VINBAX	Vietnam
PASSEX	Cambodia

In terms of traditional security, the People's Liberation Army has claimed control over the South China Sea through increased surveillance, conflicting claims over maritime territories, construction of artificial islands and conflicts with the Philippine Coast Guard. The significance of the South China Sea can be traced to economic and diplomatic reasons for India. Though India has no territory in the region, it has a stake in it due to economic interests and its relationship with the ASEAN. Disputes and non-traditional threats in the region have led to repercussions for regional maritime security. India's position on the issue was highlighted in the joint ASEAN-India Vision Statement. It stated that India was committed to strengthening maritime cooperation as well as freedom of navigation and safety of sea lanes of communication in accordance with international law. Such as UNCLOS. The Indian Navy has had multiple deployments to the region since 2000. These include unilateral appearances, bilateral exercises, friendly port calls, surveillance and transits. In 2016, four ships of the Indian Navy's Eastern Fleet, INS Satpura, INS Sahyadri, INS Shakti and INS Kirch. The purpose of this deployment was to strengthen defence ties and enhance interoperability. It made port calls at Cam Rahn Bay in Vietnam, Subie Bay in the Philippines and Port Klang in Malaysia, lasting four days each. In 2019, India carried out a joint sale in the region with navies of the US, Japan and the Philippines, and also expressed interest in navigation of the same. Due to India's third party posturing and prominence as a neutral neighbour, Vietnam and other Southeast Asian countries have asked it to intervene by stabilising naval cooperation and balancing China's intrusion. China's rise and increasing trade with Southeast Asia necessitates India's collaboration with the region. (Saha 2025) The rapid and unprecedented rise of China has led to expansion of their military modernisation. This continuing modernisation, consisting of an arsenal of nuclear, conventional, cyber and space capabilities has been considered a threat to other major powers in the region. In addition, North Korea is also developing advanced nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles. The growing cooperation between Russia and China is also a concern. This great power rivalry

has made the region strategically significant with India being the major strategic partner of the US in containing China. Due to various defence agreements India is part of, India is the net security provider. In response to this military buildup, India has intensified its military diplomacy with Southeast Asian countries through the increasing frequency of joint military exercises, exchange programmes, high-level visits and so on. (Kumar, 2024; Vergun, 2025)

The region is challenged by non-conventional security threats Southeast Asia is a piracy and maritime terrorism prone area that impacts trade and general security. It has been a major problem since 2008 and has expanded since 2020 in the Singaporean Strait. India and Southeast Asia have taken various steps to counter piracy. In their 2021 Joint Statement, both declared to counter piracy and armed robbery against ships through appropriate mechanisms under the ASEAN-India framework and other ASEAN led mechanisms. The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) views piracy and terrorism as a transnational maritime crime. India participated in the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combatting Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia. Alongside Singapore, India established the ReCAAP Information Sharing Centre (ISC). It is located in Singapore and the Indian Coast Guard hosted the twelfth ReCAAP capacity building workshop in 2019. It helps share information related to high-seas incidents and builds capacities through training, It also provides a naval platform for boats, counter piracy coordination and mutual legal assistance. The Singapore Navy has established an Information Fusion Centre (IFC) in 2009, where India has posted an Indian Naval officer for coordination. The MILAN exercise conducted by the Indian Navy annually also serves to address piracy and terrorism at sea. (Devare 2005; Jha 2021) Cybercrime has been the rising concern of the century. Southeast Asia and India face a number of cyber threats such as Disseminated Renunciation of Services and Critical Information Infrastructure disruptions. India and ASEAN have tried to address this challenge through the first ASEAN-India Track 1.5 Dialogue on Cyber Issues in 2019. It included various stakeholders and revolved around data protection and governance. And cybersecurity laws. The second session was conducted by the Ministry of External Affairs and the Observer Research Foundation in 2020. (Manhas 2024) In terms of transnational crime, such as money laundering and human trafficking, both India and Southeast Asia converge on the issue. The Asean-India Joint Declaration for Cooperation to Combat International Terrorism, seeks cooperation to end transnational crime. Climate change, environmental degradation and IUU fishing are other concerns for both India and Southeast Asia. India and Southeast Asia have been identified as one of the most vulnerable areas affected by natural disasters and climate risk. The creation of artificial islands in the South China Sea has destroyed corals and reeds, The Department of Foreign Affairs of Philippines has previously warned that massive, large-scale ocean filling/reclamation has had detrimental effects on the environment. The illegal unreported unregulated fishing activities in this region include surpassing approved allocation of fishing targets, fishing without an authorisation, fake licenses, or breaking the fisheries law. It has led to depletion of fish stocks and

destroyed maritime habitats. India and ASEAN have resolved to enhance cooperation to ensure environmental protection, marine biodiversity, and sustainable fisheries. (Santarita, 2024)

The Andaman and Nicobar Command is the first tri-services command established in 2001 at Port Blair. The islands possess strategic importance as they are geo-strategically overlooking the Strait of Malacca in the east and Indian Ocean in the west, making them absolutely ideal as a base for surveillance, especially on China. It manages India's interactions with the Southeast Asian navies. It conducts coordinated patrols biannually with Thailand and Indonesia as well as the biennial MILAN exercise. It also safeguards vital global shipping routes and controls critical chokepoints for South and Southeast Asia, (Pant, n.d.; *Strategic Importance of Andaman and Nicobar Command- a Revaluation*, 2021)

The Indo-Pacific has emerged as a vital and dynamic region for geopolitical and geoeconomic equations to play out. Both India and Southeast Asia occupy advantageous positions in the region, which shapes the regional security architecture. The convergence of the IPOI and AOIP reflects the shared understanding of a rules based order and the cooperation needed to bring the vision to fruition. India, through its multifaceted engagement, especially with its naval forces is committed towards achieving a stable maritime order and holistic maritime cooperation. Assets such as the Andaman Nicobar Command and active deployments have cemented India as the net security provider. As non-traditional threats continue to gain relevance, India and Southeast Asia must work together to safeguard the region and strengthen their standing in it.

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