CHAPTER-I

GEOPOLITICS OF REORIENTATION: CONTEXTS, TEXTS, AND MAPS

INTRODUCTION

Foreign policy is not only about the study of international relations. A critical geopolitical perspective would insist that we approach and analyze foreign policy by taking into account the geopolitical visions as well as social contexts in which these visions rise and fall. Foreign policy sites are continuously created on a daily basis through various activities performed in relation to the real or imagined ‘outside’. As rightly pointed out by Krishna (1999: 6), “Foreign policy may be regarded as a set of practices oriented toward the creation and maintenance of boundaries, borders and distinctions between a self and other(s): a spatial identity forming discourse; an act of simultaneous self-fashioning and worlding.” This process of ‘worlding’ refers to how the imaginative geography of ‘self’ is projected against the ‘other’. Foreign policy discourse gives rise to (and is in turn sustained by) the categories of us/them, domestic/foreign, self/other, inside/outside (Krishna, 2001; O Tuathail and Dalby, 1998). This is how ‘states’ are perpetually established, projected and defended in discursive practices.

To quote, O Tuathail and Dalby (1998: 4),

> Foreign policy involves the making of the ‘foreign’ as an identity and space against which a domestic self is evoked and realized. The construction of the ‘foreign’ is made possible by practices that also constitute the ‘domestic’. In other words, foreign policy is a ‘specific sort of boundary-producing political performance’ (emphasis supplied).

The foreign policy discourse involves geopolitical representations and geopolitical visions. A geopolitical vision can be defined in the words of Dijkink (1996:11) as, “any idea concerning the relation between one’s own and other places, invoking feelings of (in)security or (dis)advantage (and/or) invoking ideas about a collective mission or foreign policy strategy”. Geopolitical visions often invoke an emotional attachment to a place and maintain a distinction between ‘them’ and ‘us’. It is important to note, especially for the purposes of this thesis that there may be several, even competing, geopolitical visions within a state, upheld by various institutions (state and non-state) and
even political parties. What an ‘ideal type’ of geopolitical vision requires is outlining the account of the nation/national-self vis-à-vis the ‘outside’ world. This is often done by projecting the borders of a nation-state as ‘natural’; and this ‘naturalness’, is claimed and reinforced through sacrifice and blood shedding in their defence (Dijkink 1996).

Most geopolitical visions project the world as divided between two opposite systems; where one’s own nation is perceived as located in between, protecting the ‘cause of the right’ or acting as an intermediary. Here, as an example, it would be interesting to refer to Nehru’s vision of India, which portrays the nation as a coalescence of sacred geography and secular culture. After independence, Nehru chose to define the role of India in international system in terms of non-alignment. His vision of India vis-à-vis the two superpowers was that of a proud and independent nation capable of judging every issue of vital importance in the international system on its own merit. Till 1960s, it was Nehru’s vision that dictated, by and large, the foreign policy of India, which was based on anti-colonialism and non-alignment. He believed that the freedom of India was a part of the freedom of the world, and that India would never play a secondary role in global affairs (Muni and Raja Mohan, 2002). India, in his geopolitical vision, was ‘positioned’ between the two superpowers, and could either count for a great deal or not count at all (Nehru, 1999). As we would later observe at some length, Nehru, a great visionary, was well aware of the geostrategic location of India in Asia and envisioned an Eastern Federation where India and Southeast Asia along with other Asian nations would come together (Muni and Raja Mohan, 2002).

Andrei P. Tsygankov, (2007) has argued that, the success of a foreign policy depends on a large extent to its ability to draw on existing system of cultural values. In the course of defending a nation’s security, economy, and social life-style, state actors rely heavily on these values, and in the process reshape and mobilise them in a manner that furthers the nation’s interests, and helps the nation in accomplishing its principal goals. In short, the cultural dimensions of a foreign policy remain critically important and this is amply illustrated in the case of India’s ‘Look East’ policy and relations with Association of Southeast Asian Nations (to be cited hereafter as ASEAN).

We tend to maintain throughout this thesis that India’s foreign policy and its diplomatic strategies are in the process of a fundamental shift in terms of both ideas and ideals. It is characterized today by “unprecedented pragmatism as well cautious
idealism” (Chaturvedi, 2006: 207). According to C. Raja Mohan (2003:3), “it is not often that a country finds itself on the verge of multiple breakthroughs on foreign policy. India is at one of those rare moments.” The end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union have compelled the foreign policy establishments throughout the world to adapt to the uncertainties unleashed by the withering away of the Cold War geopolitical order. Both the key guiding texts of inter-national diplomacy, as well as their contexts, are being revisited (and in many cases revised) by foreign policy elites the world over. The conventional wisdom in the realm of foreign policy and diplomacy has failed to take into account the critical role played by the dynamic geopolitical visions entertained by the political elites located in diverse institutional settings; with many of such settings not falling within the traditional understandings of foreign policy instruments and institutions. Under such a changed global scenario, India’s foreign policy has shown a great deal of flexibility in adapting to the challenge of global geopolitical transition. India’s image of itself in a globalising and regionalizing world too has changed in a meaningful way.

This chapter begins with a brief engagement with concepts like geopolitical discourse, geopolitical reasoning in foreign policy, and geopolitical representations. It also attempts to describe the notion of (re)orientation in foreign policy and diplomacy, with special reference to its geopolitical dimension. The chapter also provides a brief historical overview of the nature and scope of India’s engagement with the countries of Southeast Asia both before and during the Cold War. It takes into account India’s changing image of itself in the post-Cold War. This chapter also tries to show how geoeconomics has become an important dimension of foreign policy and diplomacy in general, in a globalizing world, and how some of the major explanations for a major shift in foreign policy can be explained accordingly.

RETHINKING GEOPOLITICS: CLASSICAL TO CRITICAL

Geopolitics, in its classical sense, is a set of theories and concepts that often serve as an aid to statecraft. Critical geopolitics aims to expose the excesses contained within classical and Cold War geopolitics (O Tuathail, 2000; Kelly, 2006). There can be two overlapping versions of critical geopolitics. First is the deconstructivist mode of reading through the texts, scripts and foreign policy discourse and the classical geopolitical statements and theories, its major exponents being Simon Dalby (1998), G. O Tuathail (1996), and Klaus John Dodds (1994). The second version of critical geopolitics takes
into account the geopolitical economy approach to the critical analysis of traditional theory. The major exponents of this strand are John Agnew and Stuart Corbridge (1995). However, a few scholars like Kelly (2006) are of the view that it is the first version of analysis which is more prevalent. However, it is the interrelationship and interplay between the two versions of critical geopolitics that is extremely relevant for the purposes of this thesis.

In critical scholarship in Political Geography and International Relations, “spaces and regions—and their meanings—have increasingly been conceptualized as socially constructed in and through political, social and cultural practices (Strüver, 2007: 682). Attention is being focused on space-producing practices, symbolic meanings, questions of identity that are often ignored by the empiricist and descriptive approaches. Furthermore, “these analyses go beyond physical and institutional accounts of territories and, instead, turn to their representational aspects. This [critical geopolitics] approach includes the attempt to overcome the traditional distinction between “real” and symbolic or imagined spaces, for the latter are as real in their existence as the former” (Ibid.). As John Agnew (2000: 107) has argued, regions “are not simply bounded spaces on a map but complex mixes of representational projection and material functional interrelationships.”

Critical geopolitics makes an attempt to problematize the geopolitical knowledge as it exists (O Tuathail, 1998). It is concerned as much with maps of meaning as it is with maps of states. Critical Geo-political perspectives relentlessly question the traditional meaning of geopolitics which claimed to represent international politics as ‘an intelligible spectacle without interpretation’ and thus explore the ‘situatedness’ of knowledge. Geography too is seen as a form of power/knowledge and traditional geopolitics is critically reconceptualized as a discursive practice by which intellectuals of statecraft belonging to core powers and hegemonic states spatialize international politics into certain types of places, peoples and dramas (O Tuathail, 1996:60). Critical geopolitics questions the graphing/writing of global space by the intellectuals and institutions of statecraft. John Agnew (2003) argues that the entity called world is ‘made’ (carved) through the process of ‘writing’ (graphing) the earth. This world is first visualised as a whole in modern geopolitical imagination and then divided into different ‘blocs’. Whereas the ‘civilizational’ geopolitics divided the globe through categories like modern/backward, European/non-European; the ideological geopolitics of the Cold War period used the binaries such as East/West, and First/Second/Third Worlds.
Another important feature of the modern geopolitical imagination is its state-centrism and the pursuit of the so-called ‘national’ interests. What is common to both is the pursuit of primacy: economic or political (Agnew, 2003).

Critical geopolitics draws upon the Foucauldian premise of power-knowledge-nexus. Both power and knowledge are seen as operating geopolitically. There is a certain spatialisation of knowledge, a demarcation of a particular field of knowledge, and the establishment of subjects, objects, rituals and boundaries by which a foreign policy universe is demarcated and described (Dodds and Sidaway, 1994). Rather than something which exists in and of itself and which can be analyzed in isolation, a discourse produces something else, including an utterance, a concept, an effect (Mills, 1997: 97). Discourse becomes effective only when it combines effectively the elements of truth, power and knowledge. Besides Foucault, Derrida’s theories of knowledge/power nexus in discourse and textual deconstruction, as mentioned earlier, have considerably influenced a lot the field of critical geopolitics. (Verkunnen, 2003: Internet Source).

In a critical geopolitical analysis, a great deal of importance is being attached to the representational practices deployed by the political elites in the making of a foreign policy (see Kelly 2006; Dodds and Sidaway, 1994; Dalby 1990). Critical geopolitics proposes that geopolitics as a category is not a singularity rather a ‘plurality of representational practices’ that are diffused throughout societies. In addition to the practice of statecraft by leaders and their advisors, geopolitics is also a broad social and cultural phenomenon (O Tuathail and Dalby, 1998). Critical geopolitics, however, is yet to apply/address itself to the complex interplay between geopolitics (geopolitical discourses) and geoeconomics.

UNDERSTANDING A GEOPOLITICAL DISCOURSE

Discourses can be referred to as ways of constructing knowledge about a particular topic. Discourses facilitate the formation of certain kinds of ideas, images and practices, which provide ways of communicating/representing, forms of knowledge and are conducted to particular social activities and institutions. Geopolitical discourse offer busy policy makers, journalists and citizens a seemingly comprehensive vision of world politics. It
provides a framework within which local events in one place can be related to a large global picture.

Modern geopolitical discourse was born in an era of imperialist rivalry. "Political leaders act through certain geopolitical discourses and it is through the mobilization of certain simple geographical understandings that foreign policy actions are explained and rendered meaningful" (O Tuathail and Agnew, 1992: 191). It is important therefore to analyze political texts like speeches, official documents and statements since they help us understand how world is constructed socially and what role does geographical knowledge play in that social construction. Discourses, therefore, can also be usefully understood as mobilization of socio-cultural resources by the intellectuals and institutions of statecraft for constructing certain meaning about their world. A discourse, as pointed out above, is not simply speeches or written statements but more of rules by which verbal speeches and written statements are made meaningful” (Ibid.: 192).

Discourse (be it India’s ‘Look East’ policy) makes readers/listeners and speakers/audience believe what they read and hear and construct it into an ‘organised meaningful whole’. According to Agnew and Corbridge (1997: 47),

What is said or written by political elites comes about as a result of the unconscious adoption of rules of living, thinking and speaking that are implicit in the texts, speeches or documents that are produced. But the rules are also constituted in this form as ‘epistemological enforcers’ or signifiers to people in general of how they should live, think and speak.

Explaining the geopolitical discourse, Simon Dalby (1990: 20) says that in the geopolitical tradition, the processes of inclusion of the ‘same’ and exclusion of the ‘other’ are complementary to each other. This ‘other’ is seen more in terms of difference rather than enmity. Geopolitical discourses about ‘sameness’ and ‘otherness’ are not permanent and keep changing; a fact amply illustrated by the way India neglected its ‘neighbourhood’ to the east up until the end of the Cold War.

Critical geopolitics problematizes what O Tuathail (1998; 1996: 69) calls the ‘Cartesian perspective’ which takes the world as a reality ‘out there’. Geopolitics has a tendency to portray international politics as some kind of a theater: with geography becoming the stage, politics the drama, and geopoliticans the detached observers of this representational spectacle. (1996: 227). This is how a particular kind of meaning gets assigned to a particular text from a particular kind of positioning or location. As Simon Dalby (2007: 586-87) puts it so succinctly,” in the era of globalization spatial political and economic categories are frequently invented, challenged, reinvented and discarded in
the ongoing strategies used by statespersons and business people to legitimise their actions.” The complex nature of interplay between geopolitics and geoeconomics (which we tend to focus particularly in this thesis) is ably captured by Dalby (2007: 587) as follows:

Neo-liberal arguments for economic integration frequently use powerfully persuasive geographical metaphors. In part, these are a method of tying the interests of business and state elites together in complicated institutional manners, but they are also a vocabulary that enables novel political arrangements and allows business people and state functionaries to undertake new initiatives precisely by specifying supposedly novel geographical arrangements in all sorts of regional specifications...novel geographical designations [e.g., East Asia, Asia-Pacific] thus have considerable utility in the discourses of economics, politics and journalism.

One of our key arguments, which we intend to maintain throughout the course of this thesis (against the backdrop of our contention, stated earlier in this chapter that the interplay between geopolitics and geoeconomics is moot, far more complex, and nuanced than often believed) is that the spatial structures through which geoeconomic agents/agencies order their knowledge of a globalizing world, often function as ontological categories of political thought and both limit and shape thinking as well as practices accordingly. Such spatial structures can be called ‘metageographies’ and some interesting examples of these can be seen in the foreign policy discourses deployed by India in its engagement with Southeast Asia/ASEAN through ‘Look East’ policy.

**Formal Geopolitical Reasoning**

As mentioned earlier, critical geopolitics understands geography to be the social and political ‘graphing’ of the ‘geo’; “writing the earth” in ways that are apparently obvious but which are spatial specifications with very considerable capability generating aspects (Sparke, 2000). However, it is very important to take note of David Harvey’s (2001) cautionary note against a ‘settled understanding of geography’. For example, we would like to argue and illustrate in this thesis that India’s ‘Look East’ policy and its engagements with ASEAN are far from being marked and driven by a ‘settled understanding of geography’. There are in fact different geographical knowledges of India’s ‘Look East’ policy (as well as the perceptions that feed into as well as emerge
from that policy) being produced by different institutional settings in accordance with their respective interests, purposes/priorities, cultures and norms. As a result, what seems to drive India’s engagement with the ASEAN is a set and spectrum of geographical knowledges rooted in varying perspectives. There are, therefore, a number of institutional sites/settings involved in the geographical knowledge productions of India’s foreign policy. Such a production of geopolitical knowledge takes place at the following sites: formal, practical, popular and structural (O Tuathail, 1999; 1996) (see Figure 1).

![Figure 1: Geopolitics: A Critical Geopolitics Conceptualization](image-url)


A formal geopolitics is concerned with how the intellectuals and institutions of statecraft shape geopolitical thought in particular places and contexts. Those engaged in
the production of formal geopolitical reasoning might include think tanks like RAND Corporation and Georgetown Centre for the Strategic and International Studies in the United States or Institute of Defence and Strategic Analysis (IDSA) in India. Geopolitics, a twentieth century tradition of thinking about statecraft, began with the likes of Friedrich Ratzel, Alfred Thayer Mahan, Rudolf Kjellen and Halford Mackinder, evolved further with Karl Haushofer and Nicholas J. Spykman during the so-called ‘Twenty Years Crisis’, and further developed with the intellectuals like Henry Kissinger, Zbigniew Brzezinski and George Kennan in the Cold War period. David Harvey (2001) argues that educational and research institutions of repute might also be involved in the production of geographical knowledges. Although the politics behind the production of geographical knowledges can influence the entire education system, Political Science and Geography are often among the most politicised disciplines.

An interesting example of formal geopolitics would be Mackinder’s address to the Royal Geographical Society in 1904 and his ‘heartland thesis’. Mackinder had proclaimed that for the first time in the history of humankind, one could “perceive something of the real proportion of features and events on the stage of the whole world and may seek a formula which shall express certain aspects, at any rate, of geographical causation in history” (cited in O Tuathail, Dalby and Routledge, 1998:16). Mackinder’s thesis is important in the history of geopolitics in general (with significant implications for Asian geopolitics) for three reasons: first, it gives the impression as if the world as a whole has been scanned with a divine eye; second, it divides the global space into distinct areas of geopolitical and geostrategic reasons for the first time; and third, it offers a highly seductive narrative on how geography conditions the course of history and politics (Sloan, 1999). Mackinder’s thesis is a very good example of critical geopolitical argument that geopolitical theories are always embedded somewhere and the ‘objective’ knowledge they claim to formulate is the knowledge what ‘their culture interprets and constructs as the real’. Mackinder proclaimed in 1919: “Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland; who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island: Who rules the World-Island commands the world” (cited in O Tuathail, Dalby and Routledge, 1998:17). Mackinder calls Eurasia the ‘World-Island’ and the ‘pivot area’ the ‘heartland’ (see Figure 2). Reading between the lines, the message was to prevent German expansion in East Europe and a German alliance with what he calls ‘heartland’ which later on coincided with the erstwhile Soviet Union. Mackinder gave his
'heartland' theory in the imperial context when the British imperialism was on decline. He was of the view that the discipline of Geography could and should be used to teach British school children to 'think' imperially (O Tuathail, 1996; O Tuathail, Dalby and Routledge, 1998).

Figure 2: Mackinder's Original Model

Source: Centre for the Study of Geopolitics, Department of Political Science, Panjab University

It can be argued that this thesis of Mackinder played a significant role in shaping ideological geopolitics. The erstwhile Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) turned out to be the 'heartland' Mackinder had spoken of. There was ideological expansion of socialism under the aegis of the USSR and stood as the 'other' against the western camp.

Practical Geopolitics in Foreign Policy

Practical geopolitics deals with the geographical politics involved in the everyday practices of foreign policy. It takes into account how geographical understandings and perceptions go into conceptualizing foreign policy and decision-making. Practical geopolitical reasoning is about the conduct of foreign policy on everyday basis (see O
Practical geopolitical reasoning, in the form of ordinary and informal everyday discourse, is often circulated through educational institutions. It plays a major role in socializing individuals into certain national identities and geographical/historical consciousness. It is the geopolitical elite (the intellectuals and institutions of statecraft) those who create normative values and rules for the conduct and strategy of statecraft and write the geographies of international relations; the entire community of government officials, political leaders, foreign policy experts and advisors in different parts of the globe. This community emerged and evolved with the Westphalian state system and until the twentieth century, remained rather small with most intellectuals being the practitioners of statecraft and vice-versa. This community has been on the rise in recent past (see O Tuathail, 1999; Agnew and Corbridge, 1995). From another perspective, practical geopolitics refers to the rhetoric used by policy makers and politicians in the actual practice of foreign policy. The raw material for practical geopolitics, as illustrated by us in various parts of thesis, is the speeches and the public addresses given by the political elite of a country (O Tuathail, Dalby and Routledge, 2006).

Far from being neutral or objective, the intellectuals of statecraft and their mental maps are deeply rooted in institutional structures. Unlike classical geopolitics, critical geopolitics does not simply take into account what the intellectuals have to say but also examines various institutions and social networks that enable them in the first place to qualify as intellectuals on geopolitics. During the early imperialist era, such primary institutions were mainly universities and learned societies. The process of selecting certain intellectuals as ‘experts’ is a highly political and politicized process. What critical geopolitics also targets and aims at is deconstructing the discourses created by the powerful and the hegemonic categories. Critical geopolitics, in other words, looks into the politics behind the production of geopolitical knowledge by intellectuals, institutions and practicing statesmen (see O Tuathail, 1998b; 1996; Crampton and O’ Tuathail, 1996; Dalby, 1990; Cox, 1986; Agnew, 1983).

It is useful to bear in mind that practical geopolitical reasoning relies more on common-sense narratives and distinctions rather than formal models. In a geopolitical discourse, socio-spatial representation is done through linguistic representations.
Discourse analysis therefore works on public texts. In the working of a foreign policy, much is hidden in terms of intentions or secret plans. Foreign policy subjects, objects and concepts cannot be seen as existing independent of discourse (O Tuathail, 1999; Waever, 1996: Internet Source). O Tuathail (1999) puts forth the notion of ‘grammar of motives’ that seeks answers to certain questions related to how the intellectuals of statecraft deal with everyday happenings. This is how the practical geopolitical reasoning works. The important questions here are: what was done; when/where it was done; who did it; how he did it; and why he did it (Ibid.). As far as India’s ‘Look East’ policy is concerned, chapter two analyzes, in some detail, when the policy was launched, why it was launched and what was the context of the policy. We believe that our engagement in this thesis with the practical geopolitics of India’s ‘Look East’ policy can be further enriched by drawing on David Harvey’s critical scholarship.

David Harvey (2001) looks at some primary sites that are involved in the production of varied geographical knowledges, the most important being the state apparatus. The process of state formation itself has been dependent on the production of certain kinds of geographical knowledge since the Westphalian state system came into being; with concepts like territory, boundary, mapping, nation and identity playing a central role. It is important for the state apparatus to ‘create’ and analyze ‘facts’ so as to introduce and sustain some kind of ‘objectivity’ in its govern-mentality. Harvey argues that the state continues to be the primary site of knowledge production relevant for the creation and maintenance of its powers. There exist various departments and agencies within the state apparatus which develop not only expertise on areas such as agriculture, forestry, transportation, energy, etc. but also diverse (often competing) definitions of what constitutes national interest. However, the state apparatus holds sway over the collection, analysis and dispersion of knowledge with ‘objectivity’. This is the site where the ‘Establishment’ composed of various ministries and departments--- Ministry of External Affairs, Home Ministry, Defence Ministry, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, etc. -- come to the fore (Ibid.).

Traditionally, the major ‘site’ that has been involved in the knowledge production of ‘external’ affairs and the conduct of ‘foreign’ policy is the Ministry of External or Foreign Affairs. Nevertheless, due to the fast changing meanings of traditional diplomacy and much enhanced salience and visibility of the factors and forces of
globalizing political economy, a lot more institutions and actors, (governmental and non-
governmental) are getting involved in the conduct of practical geopolitics. Harvey (2001) 
argues that keeping in mind the marketing possibilities, locational preferences and 
resource availability, the corporate and commercial sector too is getting involved with 
knowledge production in the domain of foreign policy.

The importance of diverse sites of knowledge production in the realm of foreign 
policy becomes clear from the following text from Indian External Affairs Minister, 
Pranab Mukherjee’s speech. Mukherjee (2007: Internet Source) remarks,

Geography is no longer a buffer. Events taking place across 
borders, near and far, impact in a much more direct manner 
on us. In some cases, such developments effect our bilateral 
and regional relations; in other cases they affect our economic 
and social fabric. To develop a robust foreign policy response, 
we have strongly felt the need to institute a mechanism 
through which the public—by which I mean civil society, 
NGOs, academia, business and industry, and media – is 
constantly apprised of the implications of a particular foreign 
policy initiative, and more importantly, of the strategic 
rationale behind it. This is the remit of the Public Diplomacy 
Division. It is our hope at the same time that as it informs the 
public of the broader rationale behind foreign policy, it will 
also be able to glean from such interactions the much required 
inputs of public perceptions of a foreign policy decision or 
initiative.

After India opted for the policy of economic liberalization and the so-called structural 
reforms, new sites that have become increasingly involved in the production of 
geographical knowledges across the entire gamut of India’s foreign policy are: Ministry 
of External Affairs, Home Ministry, Defence Ministry, Ministry of Commerce and 
Industry, Ministry of Finance, and institutions like the Indian Council of Cultural 
Relations (ICCR), the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry 
(FICCI), the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), the Associated Chambers of 
Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM), Oil and Natural Gas Corporation 
Limited (ONGC- Videsh) and Gas Authority of India Limited (GAIL). In addition to 
these, sub-national actors or the federal units have also been actively taking part in 
India’s economic diplomacy. The role played by such actors or units in knowledge 
production, with regard to India’s ‘Look East’ policy will be discussed in detail in 
chapter three.
Another key site involved in knowledge production is a country’s armed forces, even though its role is often kept secret for reasons related to perceived national security considerations. This relationship between geographical knowledge and the military has remained very strong ever since the times of the Romans (Harvey, 2001). For instance, the military-strategic elite of India have a different view on the border dispute with China as compared with the Ministry of External Affairs or the Ministry of Home. We would return to this point in chapter two at some length.

The role of popular geopolitics in India-ASEAN relations demands and deserves due attention. According to O Tuathail, (2002, 1999; O Tuathail and Dalby, 1998), popular geopolitics refers to how national identity and the images of ‘self’ and ‘other’ are constructed through education, popular print and visual media, cinema, and everyday practices. It is at these sites that a geopolitical discourse is produced and reproduced on a daily basis and gets manifested in practical terms. These sites produce geographical knowledge at the popular level through image projection and representations for the masses producing the effect which is subjective and affective in nature rather than objective (Harvey, 2001).

Joanne Sharp (2000) shows how a popular magazine like the Reader’s Digest was used during the Cold War for producing a certain kind of ideological geopolitics. The magazine published at regular intervals articles by ‘experts’ that posited the Soviet Union as diametrically opposite to the United States. The Soviet Union was projected as totally at odds with the United States—politically, economically, culturally, historically and ideologically. Such representations of the ‘Other’ helped a great deal in mobilizing public opinion in favour of America (Agnew, 2003; O Tuathail, 2003). As later sections of the thesis would argue and illustrate, popular perceptions and images, both negative and positive, do play a central role in the unfolding dynamics of India’s ‘Look East’ policy and India-ASEAN relations.

MAPPING INDIA’S RELATIONS WITH ‘SOUTHEAST ASIA’: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

India’s ‘Look East’ policy, launched under the then Prime Minister Narsimha Rao in the early 1990s, did not originate in a vacuum. It was rather a resuscitation of the age-old relations between India and Southeast Asia. Ancient Chinese, Indians, Arabs and Romans had fairly clear mental maps of Southeast Asia. To the ancient Chinese, it was Nan Yang; to the Indians, Savarandvipa (the golden land); to the Arabs, Qumr. It offered
an alternative passage to the passes of Central Asia for the traders of the vast China market; thus acting as an archipelagic highway. It was under the Guptas and Harsha that one finds the partial emigration from the Indian sub-continent to Burma and Malacca. In 600BC, the Saka kings of Gujarat, who, anticipating the impending decline of their kingdoms, started to look for refuge outside and made preparations to migrate to Java. A formidable fleet set sail from the shores of Gujarat and reached the West coast of Java. This was the first wave of emigrants from the West coast of India to have settled in Java, thus contributing in large measures towards the spread of Indian art and culture in Southeast Asia. The Aryans from the north drifted south between 600BC and 400BC, and by about first and second century AD, they had extended their influence even beyond the shores of India, reaching distant lands such as the Malay Peninsula and the Indonesian Archipelago (Sridharan, 1982). This stretch of land including Burma, the Malay Peninsula and the Indonesian Archipelago was referred to as the *Suvarnabhumi* (the golden land). The *Jataka* stories, Ptolemy and certain Chinese sources refer to the *Suvarnabhumi* time and again. Indian merchants went to the *Suvarnabhumi* in search of wealth by trading with the local people (Verghese, 2002; Sridharan, 1982).

By the first and second centuries, sea voyages that took Indians overseas for trade and commerce, naturally led to intimate activities and subsequent settlement in the Far East. The Malaya Peninsula (see Figure 3) occupied a vantage point in the maritime trade and the traders moved on further East from this gateway. The earliest kingdom of the Hindus to be found in Sumatra was that of Sri Vijaya, which gradually expanded into a great naval and commercial power by the end of the 17th century AD. By achieving the control of the Malacca Straits, it attained dominant position in eastern Indian Ocean. This supremacy existed until the rise of the Shailendras in Farther India, a great naval power of the time. By the end of the 17th century AD, Sumatra, Java and the Malaya Peninsula came under the sway of the Sailendras and this brought about the unification of the Hindu kingdoms in *Suvarandwipa*. The great expeditions of Chandrabhanu (Sailendra king), involving a combined action of many thousand soldiers and hundreds of ships across the Bay of Bengal, constitute the last chapter in Hindu oceanic supremacy. Later, the Vijayanagar empire of the fourteenth century proved to be a great carrier of trade between India and the countries of Far East. Hindu kingdoms contributed a great deal towards shaping the maritime history of India. Their cultural and religious expansion into Malaya, Burma, Indonesia and Thailand and their extensive trade reaching as far as
China and Japan in the East, and Africa and the Mediterranean countries in the West, are marvelous achievements and have left their imprint on the history of that region (Sridharan, 1982).

Figure 3: The Malay Peninsula and Archipelago: Centres of Trade, Circa 1680


It was against such a backdrop of expanding trade and cultural relations with West Asia, Rome, China and Southeast Asia, right from prehistoric days, that the Indian traders and missionaries finally came to settle down in these regions. On the east, India’s Coromandel Coast developed close commercial ties with Southeast Asia. Talking about the influence of Indian interactions with Malaya, Sumatra, Java, Burma and Thailand, Arasaratnam (2004: 274) remarks, “Coromandel interests penetrated the state systems in these parts and left marked social influences there. These links had a greater continuity than those of the west.”
Ships from these parts of the world crossed the Bay of Bengal and went to the delta of the Irrawaddy, from where they proceeded to the Malay Peninsula. Demand for Eastern goods had the effect of stimulating Indian trading along the Malay Peninsula. It is not surprising that Roman coins, pottery, amphora and other trade goods of Indian origin have been found in the Malay Peninsula. The Indo-Roman contact declined during the 3rd and 4th centuries BC, but India’s relationship with Southeast Asia continued. The Indian cultural influence upon Southeast Asia was historically known as ‘Indianization’. In his classic treatise, *The Indianized States of South East Asia*, G. Coedes (1968) calls much of Southeast Asia as ‘Indianized’ states or ‘Farther India’, where China and India meet and present a peaceful amalgamation of the two. The relationship dating back to the 5th century BC also began with spiritual and cultural affinities of the Southeast Asian countries towards India. Buddhism and Hinduism went from India and took roots in those societies (Ram, 2000; Coedes, 1968). It is significant to argue that some of the earliest Sanskrit inscriptions in Southeast Asia are as old as those in India (Coedes, 1968). The first wave of Indianization of Southeast Asia took place in the regions like Funan; Lankasuka, Tambralinga and Takkola in Malay Peninsula; and Champa. Following this was the second Indianization, which took place in regions like Funan and Champa, Irrawady and Menam (Ibid.).

Some of the earlier scholarship on the subject considers ‘Indianization’ as an Indian initiative with large-scale migration leading to the settlement of colonies in Southeast Asia. According to these scholars, this region was more or less at the receiving end and played a passive role. However, the arrival of a large number of Indians did not result in significant social changes in the region. The people of Southeast Asia did not adopt the Indian social practices like the caste system or the food habits. Politically, none of the supposed Southeast Asian ‘colonies’ showed any allegiance to India. Economically speaking, the states of Southeast Asia were not Indian colonies since the latter did not enjoy monopoly in the field of foreign trade and there was, therefore, no scope of economic exploitation (Mishra, 2001: Internet Source). The Hindus took to the seas for commercial rather than political purposes (Sridharan, 1982). By the 15th century,

The peoples of the Indian Ocean lands, from East Africa to South East Asia, were linked by a flourishing maritime system which indirectly served markets as far afield as Europe and Japan. This complex network of maritime trade was worked by numerous mercantile groups, many of whom converted to Islam as it spread eastward from South
Asia into insular South East Asia. These groups were vital parts of a dynamic economic,
social and political indigenous world in which ideas as well as tangible commodities
passed between peoples (McPherson, 2004).

It is rather difficult to pin point exactly as to what drove the Indians to spread
their cultural influence into Southeast Asia. The consensus among the analysts appears to
be that the process of Indian cultural expansion into the region was totally non-political
and peaceful in character. Indian cultural expansion, as hinted at above, was the outcome
of endeavors of warriors, traders and priests along with the indigenous initiative. In all
probability all four groups of people were involved in the process. What facilitated a
closer contact between the two regions of Asia was the geographical proximity between
them. The fabulous wealth of Southeast Asia too was an added attraction for the Indians.
The kind of names given to different regions of Southeast Asia, for instance,
Suvarnbhumi, by the Indians can be seen as some kind of recognition of this desire for
economic gain (Ibid.).

India-Southeast Asian relations were a handiwork of both Indians and
communities of Southeast Asia. Along with traders, brahmans (priests) from India went
to Southeast Asia and introduced Indian rituals, scriptures, and literature to the
indigenous elite. Indian elements such as the Sanskrit language, the Hindu-Buddhist
cults, Dharmashastras, and the Indian concept of royalty became essential features of the
early states of Southeast Asia (Mishra, 2001: Internet Source). These spiritual and
cultural affinities between the two could be seen not only in the spread of Hinduism but
Islam and Buddhism as well. Various elements of this relationship based on reciprocity,
common interests and shared security has survived for over 2500 years despite several
ups and downs (Ghosal, 2007: Internet Source; Ram, 2000). A serious and systematic acknowledgement of such cultural links, and the earnest desire
to rejuvenate them has enabled the foreign policy establishment to accord due
importance to cultural diplomacy with Southeast Asia in the post-Cold War era.

Advent of Europeans in the Indian Ocean Region

Whereas the India-Southeast Asia relations date far back in history, as already observed,
it was only during the era of Renaissance that the European powers started making
intrusions in this region. As mentioned above, peaceful sea-borne trade, religious-
cultural expansion and movement of people through the sea continued from the early
times to the sixteenth century, particularly with the east. Indian trade which had largely
been maritime was snapped with the advent of the Europeans in the Indian Ocean. In the
15th century, maritime adventures were launched by the Europeans to establish a direct
route to India. The Portuguese and the Dutch were the first ones to venture into the
Indian Ocean and make their hold here. Malacca fell to the Portuguese in 1511 AD and
later on was seized by the Dutch in 1641 AD. Since the British were already well
established in India, it became easy for them to get a foothold in this region. With the
Portuguese coming into India, the Europeans established their supremacy over the
Eastern Seas for the next 400 years (Pannikar, 1945).

As far as the Indian Ocean was concerned, the British established their
supremacy by the end of the 18th century as well as on most of the land adjacent to it
(Singh, 2001; Pannikar, 1945). The British geopolitical impact on the Indian Ocean,
especially after the creation of Singapore, became so substantial as well as evident that
the entire region came to be known as the ‘British Lake’. Finally, Britain came to control
the strategically important Malacca Straits which were once compared by the famous
Indian historian and diplomat, K.M. Pannikar (1945:21), to the ‘mouth of a crocodile’,
with Indonesia forming the lower jaw and Malaysia, the upper. With the Europeans
colonizing this part of littoral-maritime Asia, the intimacy in India-Southeast Asia
relations gradually withered away. As a result, the Southeast Asian regions more or less
disappeared from the Indian neighborhood and took a back seat in the mental maps of
Indian policy makers. As David Ludden (2003a) puts it so aptly, “taking a long-term
view, it is evident that territorial authorities have buried knowledge about mobility in
many cultures, over many centuries…Scholars now consider mobility as border crossing,
as though borders came first, and mobility, second. The truth is more the other way
round” (Ibid.:15).

During the colonial period, a lot many Indians were taken to Southeast Asian
countries by the colonial authorities to work in plantation fields, where they led a
miserable life. Some also migrated to set up business in textiles, spice trade and retailing.
The colonial bureaucracy and army too had sizable number of Indians. In the British
colonies of Malay, Singapore and Myanmar, Indians worked in rubber, coffee and tea
plantations. The British brought to Singapore indentured laborers, mainly from southern
India for construction work. The cheap and unskilled labor in rice mills and plantations
was provided by the Indians. In the French colony of Indochina too one could find,
Indian textile merchants and moneylenders. Indians also worked for the colonial government as clerks, technicians, teachers, and traders. Colonial governments made good use of Indians to advance their geopolitical and geo-economic interests (Mishra, 2001: Internet Source).

The Indian independence movement provided a good deal of inspiration to the anti-colonial struggles in Southeast Asia. Southeast Asian leaders, such as Sukarno, Norodom Sihanouk, Aung San, and Ho Chi Minh admired Indian personalities like Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, and Jawaharlal Nehru. Many Southeast Asians also attended the sessions of the Indian National Congress and interacted with Indian leaders. It was well within the framework of their own freedom struggle that the Indian leaders mooted the concept of Asianism and emphasized the spiritualism of Asia over materialistic west. They called upon a common Asian identity in opposition to the Western geopolitics of domination. After India gained independence in 1947, it pursued a dynamic policy towards Southeast Asia. Aspiring for a meaningful role for India in Asian affairs, it convened the Asian Relations Conference of twenty-five nations, which was attended by as many as two hundred and fifty delegates. India appeared most willing to play a mediatory role in Asian affairs and even made a serious bid to lessen tensions in the region by hosting a Conference on Indonesia in 1949 (Ibid.).

COLD WAR MAPPING OF THE GLOBE: ASIA IN BINARY GEOGRAPHIES

The process of decolonisation, after the Second World War, coincided with the origins and evolution of the Cold War ideological geopolitics. The Cold War began as a series of American policies designed to rebuild Western Europe after the Second World War and gradually evolved into a system of power relations and ideological representations in which each ‘side’ defined itself in relations to the hostile ‘Other’. The United States and the Soviet Union became the key players in global geopolitics, competing over ‘how best to organize the international political economy’. The Cold War ideological geopolitics (see Figure 3) was marked by the following characteristics: (a) an ideological conflict over political economic organization; (b) three worlds of development in which American and Soviet spheres of influence contested for expansion into a Third World of the former colonies and non-aligned states; and (c) a homogenization of global space into friendly and threatening blocs in which universal models of capitalism-liberal democracy and communism reigned free of geographical contingency (Agnew, 1998).
Before the sixteenth century, Asia was never seen (even by the Asians themselves) as a monolithic-homogenous geopolitical on account of its obvious, multifaceted, mega-diversity. Asia came to be mapped as a single undifferentiated politico-economic entity by the Europeans in the 16th century. The Cold War presented Asia as a ‘chessboard’, on which the game of power politics was being played by the two superpowers and their respective military allies. According to Paul Bracken (1992: 42), “The very term Asia was itself too big to fit into the spatial requirements of the Cold War which had to do with containment, not colonization.” A new mapping of Asia was initiated by the United States, whereby, the Asian rim came to be divided into sub-regional entities like Middle East, South Asia, South East Asia, West Asia and North East Asia (Bracken, 1999). “Geographic designations drove strategic declarations,” says Bracken (Ibid.). Consequently, Eurasia too was partitioned into ‘culturally superior’ Europe and allegedly ‘inferior’ strategic domains of Southeast Asia, South Asia, West Asia, etc.

The geopolitical scripting of the globe during the Cold War was done in such a way that eastern Asia came to be seen as an integral part of the global confrontation between the Soviet Union and the West. The ‘Continental States of East and Southeast Asia,’ which were part of the communist bloc, came to be clearly demarcated and distinguished from the ‘East Asian Offshore Islands’, which were categorized as being part of the ‘Western’ lands of Asia and the Pacific. This same division was put into the global geopolitical context by the well known political geographer Saul B. Cohen (1964), who divided the world into two great geostrategic regions namely ‘The Eurasian Continental Power’ and the ‘Trade Dependent Maritime World’. These geostrategic regions were further divided into a number of geopolitical regions (Parker, 1998).

Despite mutually hostile binary geographies of the Cold War, one major trend that continued unabated was regional cooperation. Most of the regional cooperative mechanisms were ‘externally’ inspired with active participation of the superpowers and other major actors closely associated with the Cold War. At the same time, most of them were related to security, defined primarily in a military sense. Prominent among such initiatives were ANZUS, NATO, CENTO, Warsaw Pact and Five Power Defence Arrangement (FDPA). One of the key defining features of these organizations was that their objectives were consciously limited and limiting in nature—primarily the geopolitical and strategic containment of the ‘Other’ (Naidu, 1999).
In Search of Regionalism in Southeast Asia

As far as the non-Communist Southeast Asia was concerned, the origins and evolution of regional cooperation after the Second World War were neither smooth nor above suspicion. Stability in the region was conceived largely through interwoven security relationships with the United States. Eventually, on 8 August 1967, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was formed in Bangkok. It was clearly laid down that ASEAN was not being set up to oppose any particular country or ideology. There was apparently nothing to show that ASEAN was going to end up as an anti-communist front or block (Kaul, 2001).

Efforts for regional cooperation in Southeast Asia were started by Tunku Abdul Rahman of Malaya in January 1959. A communique was issued on 7 January 1959, which called for ensuring the welfare of the people of Southeast Asia and to meet the challenge of communism in the region. This raised an alarm for the rest of the countries in the region. No further progress was made in the direction of regional cooperation until July 1961. When the Association of Southeast Asia (ASA) was formed with only three members, Federation of Malaya (now part of Malaysia), the Philippines and Thailand, Indonesia, Myanmar and Cambodia did not join the association. On 5 August 1963, another regional initiative named Maphilindo (Confederation of Malaya, Indonesia and the Philippines) was launched (Ibid.). Maphilindo was described as a regional association that would approach issues of common concern in the spirit of consensus. However, it was also perceived as a tactic on the parts of Jakarta and Manila to delay, or even prevent, the formation of the Federation of Malaysia. Manila had its own claim to Sabah (formerly British North Borneo), and Jakarta protested the formation of Malaysia as a British imperialist plot. The plan failed eventually with Indonesia and Malaysia fighting over the future of the island of Borneo (Sridharan, 1996).

By 1967, Indonesian-Malaysian and Philippine-Malaysian relations had improved and talks were soon under way among these countries and Singapore and Thailand on the idea of regional cooperation in Southeast Asia. Finally, the Philippines considered the possibility of reviving Association of Southeast Asia (ASA) and proposed including Indonesia in the organization. On 8 August 1967, ASEAN was formed in Bangkok. There was no apparent difference in the economic, social, and cultural objectives of Association of Southeast Asia (ASA) and ASEAN, and the only obvious
distinction was that the latter included Indonesia and Singapore as members (Kaul, 2001). Some of the key objectives of ASEAN were to diffuse tensions, take unified political stands on certain regional and international issues and make all possible attempts to resolve disputes among member states. Notwithstanding the pronounced objectives of economic and cultural cooperation at the time it was set up, ASEAN’s immediate utility as a security framework for political consultation and to address disputes within the group was noticeable. Since the communist inspired insurgencies and secessionist movements were among the most pressing concerns at that time, anti-communism turned out to be the prime rallying point (Naidu, 1999).

The two-page ASEAN Declaration (1967: Internet Source) promulgated that, “the Association is open for participation to all States in the Southeast Asian region subscribing to the aforementioned aims, principles and purposes.” The original ASEAN logo presented five brown sheaves of rice stalks, one for each founding member. The new ASEAN emblem, which was adopted in 1997, represents a stable, peaceful, united and dynamic ASEAN. The colors used in the emblem are blue, red, white and yellow. Blue represents peace and stability and red stands for courage and dynamism. Whereas white depicts purity, the yellow symbolizes prosperity. The logo consists of ten stalks of paddy which represents the dream of ASEAN’s Founding Fathers for an ASEAN comprising all the ten countries in Southeast Asia bound together in friendship and solidarity. The circle represents the unity of ASEAN (ASEAN Name and Emblem: Internet Source).

By the time ASEAN celebrated its 30th Anniversary in 1997, the number of sheaves on the logo had increased to ten --representing all ten countries of Southeast Asia (Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, Brunei Darussalam, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam and Myanmar) (see Figure 4)and reflecting the colors of the flags of all of them. In a very real sense, ASEAN and Southeast Asia would then be one and the same, just as the founding fathers of the regional grouping had envisaged. As decades have passed by, ASEAN, with an inclusive outlook, has progressively entered into several formal and legally-binding instruments, such as the 1976 Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia and the 1995 Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear
RE-LOCATING INDIA: CHANGING ORIENTATIONS AND 'EXTENDED NEIGHBORHOOD'

It might be useful to begin this section with a discussion on 'mental maps'. Mental maps have a major role to play in the foreign policy orientations of a country. The politicians, policy-makers and even the public at large entertain certain images of places, of immediate/extended neighborhoods as well as of the world at large. These mental maps may, at times, distort reality to some extent. The factors distorting these images could
possibly include cultural conditioning and values of the actors concerned factors such as attitudes, motivations and goals (Glassner, 1996). To quote Glassner (Ibid.: 25),

> Mental, or cognitive, maps are based on individual perceptions of the world, which are nearly always influenced strongly by location and culture. Mountain dwellers and valley dwellers have different surroundings, see the world differently, and hence have different attitudes in environmental, social and political affairs, among others. Sometimes mental maps portray an idealized vision of a place, which may be far removed from reality but very influential in making decisions. Such cognitive mapping gives rise to various categories such as ‘Up West’, ‘Middle East’, ‘Far East’, etc. which apparently carry no significance on the globe per se. They come into play due to the perceptions of the people concerned (Ibid.). The role played by mental maps in shaping India’s relations with Southeast Asia shall be discussed in some length in the next chapter.

After the end of the Cold War, new geopolitical categories have gained prominence. The ‘Far East’ of the Cold War era has lost significance and this category stands replaced by ‘East Asia’ and more recently by the ‘Asia Pacific’. Asia Pacific constitutes the former Far East and Southeast Asia. Some scholars would include South Asia in the Asia Pacific. One significant implication of the term ‘Asia Pacific’ is of course the importance of the maritime dimension. This brings into picture not just the ‘Pacific’ orientation of East Asia but the growing significance of the great archipelago, which during the Cold War was considered as an insular periphery around the all important Eurasian landmass (Parker, 1998).

After the end of the Cold War, the ‘uncertainties’ associated with the territorialized threats of an ‘ideological’ geopolitics (Agnew, 1998) are being replaced by the uncertainties caused by the fuzzy identities and diffused geographies of deterritorialized threats including terrorism, nuclear proliferation and ecological degradation. Thanks to the changing global as well as regional scenario, one finds the state actors and their foreign policy establishments all over the world in the process of ‘reorienting’ themselves vis-à-vis their ‘immediate’ or ‘extended’ neighborhood(s).

In the post-Cold War period, the Indian establishment too is engaged in the process of discovering new locations of India and reorienting itself to fast changing geopolitical realities and realignments. Critically understood, there is much more to ‘location’ than the longitudes and the latitudes, as depicted on a two dimensional map.
To quote David Newman and Anssi Paasi, “State boundaries are equally social, political and discursive constructs, not just naturalized categories located between states” (1998: 127). In other words, location is constructed, relative and decided both spatially and temporally. It is constructed by the powers keeping in mind respective interests, values and perceptions. Just as boundaries may occur in real or virtual space (Ibid.) so is the case with location. Beyond one single apparently fixed territorial location, are in fact, multiple locations of geophysical, geopolitical, geoeconomic, and even geostrategic kinds. “States and other territorial entities are not static; neither are they permanent structures. As human constructs, they are historically contingent processes, which emerge, exist for some time and disappear” (Newman and Paasi, 1999: 187).

For most of its post-colonial existence, India has considered itself as firmly located in South Asia. It is useful to be reminded here that the term ‘South Asia’ emerged in the late 1950s, and was linked to the formation of the US- sponsored western military alliances that divided Asia into various strategic sub-regions such as ‘West’ Asia, ‘South East’ Asia and ‘South’ Asia (Singh, 2000a). It is largely due to the lack of questioning by the Asian political elites (as well as the masses) that the Western official mapping continues to dominate perceptions as well as policies (Newman and Paasi, 1998: 187).

It has been argued more recently by a number of critically informed intellectual commentators that the term ‘South Asia’ should be abandoned in favour of the term ‘Southern Asia’ that could include China and India’s Eastern as well as Western neighborhoods (Singh, 2000a). The importance of rethinking and re-imagining ‘South Asia’ as ‘Southern Asia’ needs to be located—as the proposed thesis purports to do—in the theoretical context of ‘critical geopolitics’. Critical writers have also questioned the colonization of the ‘the political’ by the state which had led to a rather static understanding of politics (Robins, 1995). What has been missing in the narrow state-centric conceptual imprisonment of “the political” is the assertions of the units and provinces within the state for greater autonomy and the desire to engage much more directly with the ‘external’ and related diplomacy.

That India is both willing and able to engage more directly with the complex geopolitical and geoeconomic environment of Indo-Pacific region is now beyond doubt. It is against the backdrop of growing democratization of Indian federalism on one hand,
and liberalization of Indian economy on the other hand that the concept of ‘extended neighborhood’, for example, has been popularized by Indian political leaders such as I.K. Gujral and Jaswant Singh. Mr. I. K. Gujral, the then External Affairs Minister of India, is reported to have remarked in one of his speeches, “the ASEAN decision to make India a Full Dialogue Partner is based on your farsighted assessment about the political and strategic convergence, acceleration of economic relations and their future potential, and complementarities in areas that were hitherto not evident or remained unexploited. A key objective of India and ASEAN is to move from derivative to direct relationship so that there are no distortions, no misperceptions, no ignorance and no intermediation” (Gujral, 1996: 1527).

During a lecture delivered in Singapore, in June 2000, Mr. Jaswant Singh, the then External Affairs Minister of India, is reported to have observed (cited in Mattoo, 2001: 105),

India’s parameters of security concerns clearly extended beyond confines of the convenient albeit questionable geographical definition of South Asia. South Asia was always dubious framework for situating the Indian security paradigm. Given its size, geographical location, trade links and the EEZ, India’s security environment and therefore potential concerns range from the Persia Gulf to the Straits of Malacca in the West, South and East, Central Asia in the North West China in the North East and South East Asia (emphasis supplied).

A ‘new’ mapping of India and its neighborhood is thus under way; a process likely to result in not only a change in India’s image of itself vis-à-vis the rest of the world, but also a critical rethinking of conventional categorization and compartmentalization of the global as well as Asian geopolitical spaces. There are equally positive indications that India’s foreign policy aims at breaking its ‘land-centric’ approach and is willing to engage itself much more pro-actively with maritime issues. How far will the process of decolonizing the geographical imaginations (reinforced by the Cold War) would advance and eventually translate itself into action and implementation remains to be seen and assessed. In short, one of the major intellectual tasks before the proposed thesis is to measure and assess the extent to which India’s, apparently elitist’, ‘Look East’ policy is being effectively transformed into ‘Act East’ policy, ably supported by the appropriate institution building and institutional reforms on the one hand, and the necessary positive image building and awareness campaigns on the other hand. What is beyond any doubt,

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however, is the fact that a series of internal-domestic, regional and global forces are at work behind a seriously felt political urge among India’s political elite to reorient itself in terms of hitherto ignored directions. Let us take note of some of the evidence at the level of rhetoric and discourse in this regard (in the remaining part of this section as well as the section to follow) before proceeding further with our analysis in the next chapter.

India’s former Prime Minister, Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee (2002 b: Internet Source) is reported to have said in Singapore on 9 April, 2002, “we are conscious that in the first few decades after our independence we did not attain the full promise of our relationship. This was not a reflection of a lower priority. It was a consequence of the divergences in economic ideology, political outlook and security assumptions much of which the Cold War imposed on us. Fortunately we have emerged from this straitjacket.”

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, foreign policy establishments all over the world, India included, have been reorienting themselves towards new ‘locations’. Reader’s Oxford Wordfinder (1993:1072) describes ‘orientation’ as, “the act or instance of orienting; the state of being oriented; a relative position; a person’s attitude or adjustment in relation to circumstances, especially politically or psychologically”. ‘Orientation’ refers to the attitude or bent of the foreign policy establishment vis-à-vis other states keeping in mind the interests of the ‘self’. As a result of such reorientation processes, the geographical distances, which were reinforced by the Cold War rivalries, are, in some cases (for example, India and Southeast Asia) in the process of being overcome and transformed into a ‘geopolitical proximity’ through regional diplomatic dialogues and institution building.

It can be argued that both orientation and reorientation are as much a matter of constructions as they are the outcome of new realities and practices. Several factors go into the construction of a (re)orientation including particular understandings of ‘self’ vis-à-vis ‘others’; threats, opportunities, securities and insecurities, regionalism and regionalization; multiple impacts of globalization; and of changing nature and role of boundaries. It can be argued that reorientation of the Indian Establishment in the post-Cold War context, and at a general level, was facilitated by two sets of factors. Firstly, there was a growing acknowledgement by the Indian political elite that there were several untapped opportunities for mutually beneficial cooperation with Southeast Asian countries (and the corporate sector), in increasingly diverse fields, in its so far neglected
‘neighborhood’ to the east. Secondly, there was a growing salience and assertion of political economy factors besides security interests in the national as well as federal scheme of things. Thus, economic diplomacy came to occupy a central and major role in the entire process of reorientation on the part of Indian establishment. The major factors and forces responsible behind India’s resolve to ‘reorient’ its foreign policy and diplomacy towards the ‘East’, and to engage more meaningfully with ASEAN, will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

INDIA’S CHANGING IMAGE OF ITSELF IN THE POST-COLD WAR ERA

As mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, in the post Cold War period, India’s image of itself has undergone a noticeable change. The ex-President of India, Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam (2003: Internet Source), envisions India as a developed nation in every field by 2020, if every citizen contributes towards it depending on his or her capability. His India is an India ‘that stands up to the world’ besides a free and developed India. India has to be both militarily and economically strong (Abdul Kalam: Internet Source). Whereas India’s Prime Minister, Dr. Man Mohan Singh (2006a: Internet Source), is said to have remarked,

We in India wish to ‘build a better future’ for ourselves, not because of a desire to be a ‘global superpower’; but because we want to live in peace and with dignity; in good health and gainfully employed; creating an environment conducive to the full expression of our creativity and enterprise. Size does give us a certain weight in global affairs and this will get recognized across the world. We will be seen a growth engine. But, this has to be tempered by the realization that the ultimate goal is to work for rule based rather than power based relationships. Further, such an approach is in line with our history, culture and civilization. For centuries, we have lived in peace with the world around us, traveling to distant lands as traders, teachers and scholars. Rarely has the world seen armies sailing out of India as conquerors. The Indian influence across much of Asia has been one of culture, language, religion, ideas and values, not of bloody conquest. We have always been respected for our traditional export knowledge! Does that not also make India a “global superpower”, though not in the traditional sense! Can this not be the power we seek in the next century? (2006: Internet Source).

Mr. Manmohan Singh has also emphasized that India has always been a believer in the vasudhaiva kutumbakam (the world is one family) thesis and has considered it a
guideline to solving all political problems in future (Singh 2004c: Internet Source). Such rhetoric clearly marks a shift from India’s fairly constricted image of itself to a much wider image of a truly Asian power with global reach.

Cohen (2001) talks of ‘Rising India’ as a result of a new approach to economics and development. Another important factor in India’s emergence as a world power is her cultural influence. The Indian diaspora have been playing a major role in all the corners of world, helping India to occupy a strategic position in global affairs. Her engagements with the major energy producers of the Persian Gulf and Central Asia as well as with the ASEAN countries are a clear evidence of the broadening and the deepening of India’s geopolitical vision. Moreover, India’s status as a nuclear power is widely acknowledged as an added feather in her cap (Ibid.).

It can be argued further that this change of vision is to be found not only in the political rhetoric but also in the (geo)economic discourses. The Indian corporate sector too is making a serious effort in the direction of transforming India into a global powerhouse. Indian entrepreneurs, manufacturing quality goods and using latest technology, have survived competition both at the home front and at the global level. Indian corporates appear both willing and able to face international competition. Today Indian business houses are not dependent on government support and are on the way to restructure themselves to survive in the cutthroat competition of global markets (Rai, 2005). The following texts are good pointers in the direction of the changing geopolitical vision and self-image of India. The Indian Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh (2005a: Internet Source) remarked,

I have a vision of Asia in which India has to play a key role - a vision of a resurgent Asia; an Asia of inclusive societies and open markets; an Asia of enterprise and creativity, driven by knowledge and shaped by family values; an Asia of peace, stability and development; a modern, secular and prosperous Asia. I had stated that our long-term goal should be the creation of a harmonious and prosperous community which is a seamlessly integrated market for goods, services and investments; a community which pools its enormous resources to tackle common challenges. This community must be one which goes beyond just cooperation to having a robust institutional architecture which forms the basis for regional cooperation and action. I urged other nations to seize the opportunity with foresight and wisdom...Even though our own home market is large and set to grow larger, Indian firms must seek to be globally competitive...large firms in large scale industries must think global, even as they act local. I am happy when I see Indian firms venturing out to conquer new vistas outside the country - be it for sales or for production.
The above mentioned remarks by the Indian Prime Minister bring out the kind of importance being attached to the private sector in the growing Indian economy. It can be argued that after the launch of India’s policy of liberalization and privatization, India has been involved in the phenomenon of globalization also. India’s ‘Look East’ policy, in general, and Southeast Asia in particular, is the outcome of such a thrust in this direction. This aspect is being dealt with in detail in chapter three.

To quote Mr. Onkar S. Kanwar (2005: Internet Source),

Today, the flavour of the world is India. Wherever we go, it is India and China that are spoken of, with equal optimism. The time has come for us, Indian entrepreneurs, to make a big push, as your Government puts, its best foot, forward.

These texts clearly indicate that at the economic front, both the Indian establishment and the corporate sector are aiming at the global as well as the regional markets. The joint efforts of both can be said to be moving in the direction of a ‘rising’ India.

Here, it would be relevant to mention about the establishment of Joint Business Councils between India and various countries. Joint Business Councils (JBCs) are institutional mechanisms between Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and counterpart apex chambers in different countries that facilitate business to business interaction on a regular basis. Joint Business Council arrangements have been established by Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) with 79 countries. These councils are a joint venture between private sector and the government. They provide business facilitation services by working closely with the respective governments and business promotion organizations. These councils are involved in exchange of business delegations and joint task forces so as to identify the bilateral business cooperation potential and to make suitable policy recommendations to governments. Among the ASEAN countries, JBCs have been established with Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam and the Philippines (Gateway to the World: Internet Source).

Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) launched India-Business Forum on 20 June, 2007 in Singapore. This forum brings together all the Indian companies in Singapore. Currently, there are about 2500 Indian companies working in Singapore and 30 have already joined India- Business Forum. This forum aims at promoting the image of Indian businesses in Singapore as integral players in both the Indian and the Singapore economy. It also interacts with the representatives of the respective governments of both
the countries to project the views of Indian companies (CII – India Business Forum (IBF): Singapore: Internet Source).

A large number of Indian companies are operative in Indonesia. These include Water and Power Consultancy Services (WAPCOS), Ircon International Limited, RITES, STUP Consultancy India Ltd., TCIL, PUNJ LLOYD, KEC International, TELK Ltd., BHEL and Bharat Heavy Plates. NIIT/APTEC/LCC Infotech have established Information and Technology Education Centres in Indonesia. Reliance, Kirloskars and Thermax maintain representative offices in Indonesia. Bajaj Auto is in an advanced stage of setting up a joint venture for the assembly/production of three wheelers and two wheelers in Indonesia. IRCON is currently bidding for Road Construction Projects in Indonesia and exploring Railway Rehabilitation and Construction Projects as well as prospects for leasing Locomotives (India - Indonesia Economic and Commercial Relations: Internet Source).

The major Indian groups operating in Thailand are the Aditya Birla Group, Ballarpur Industries, Baroda, Rayon Group, Usha Martin Industries, Ranbaxy Laboratories, Lupin Laboratories and the Ansals and the Uniworth International Ltd. Nippon Denro Ispat in collaboration with Thai Special Steel Pic is going to set up 2 million tonnes of sponge iron plant in Thailand (India - Thailand Economic and Commercial Relations: Internet Source).

**INTERPLAY BETWEEN GEOPOLITICS AND GEOECONOMICS**

As mentioned above, India’s foreign policy in the post-Cold War period is both about continuity and change. It can be argued on the basis of the above mentioned texts that the major change in the Indian foreign policy can be seen in terms of its economic diplomacy.

As mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, geoconomics is an increasingly growing phenomenon in the post-Cold War period all over the globe and India is no exception to it. There can be three different schools of thought regarding the relationship between geoconomics and geopolitics. First is the oft-quoted thesis that geoconomics is replacing geopolitics. The most important proponent of this view is Edward Luttwak, the Director of the Geoeconomic Programme at the Centre for International and Strategic Studies, the United States. Luttwak (1998; 1993b) argues that geopolitics is being
replaced by the phenomenon called ‘geoeconomics’ in the post-Cold War period. To quote Luttwak (1998: 126),

What is going to happen—and what we are already witnessing—is a much less complete transformation of state action represented by the emergence of “Geo-economics”. This neologism is the best term I can think of to describe the admixture of the logic of conflict with the methods of commerce— or, as Clausewitz would have written, the logic of war in the grammar of commerce.

He argues that the present day establishments all over the world have dismissed the geopolitical techniques of conflict, like war, as unfeasible. The methods of mercantilism were previously handmaiden of the actors operating the geopolitical interests. However, it is the other way round today. The commercial interests could lead to political clashes and these clashes have to be fought with and resolved through economic means (Ibid.). Luttwak defines geoeconomics very clearly in the following words,

In it, investment capital for industry provided or guided by the state is the equivalent of firepower; product development subsidized by the state is the equivalent of weapon innovation; and market penetration supported by the state replaces military bases and garrisons on foreign soil as well as diplomatic ‘influence’. …as bureaucracies writ large, states as a whole are impelled by the urge to preserve their importance in society to acquire the geo-economic substitute for their decaying security role (1993a: 314).

Luttwak (1993b: 64) believes that states are ‘territorially defined entities’ but the behaviour they are going to adopt is going to be completely geoeconomic. States are engaged in geoeconomic interests, geoeconomic offensives, geoeconomic defenses, geoeconomic intelligence and geoeconomic diplomacy. Geoeconomics is carried out by states or through the economic elite of the state to fulfil the geoeconomic interests. He argues that states, owing to fact that they are territorially constructed, ‘act geoeconomically simply…precisely to out do each other on the world scene’ (Ibid.).

According to Rosecrance (1992), an international relations expert, a new international system has emerged in the post-Cold War era. Under this system, geoeconomics has replaced geopolitics as the most crucial determinant of the rise or decline of nations, and military power is becoming increasingly less relevant and as a result, wasteful, in the context of global competition.
Another scholar, Kenichi Ohmae (1995), who can be said to fall under this school, argues that borders are constantly losing their significance in the present day globalized world. He does not agree with the state-centricism even in the corporate organisation of the world. He agrees that economic interests are becoming dominant day by day. He also claims that “… in a borderless economy, the nation-focused maps we typically use to make sense of economic activity are woefully misleading. We must, managers and policy-makers alike, face up at last to the awkward and uncomfortable truth: the old cartography no longer works” (Ibid.: 20).

Gagne (2007: Internet Source) agrees with Luttwak and says that geo economics refers to the analysis of national strategies which aims at gaining commercial and technological supremacy and not controlling the territory. One of the most important assumptions of geo economics is that the most important threat to a nation’s security is financial. Gagne argues that since there exists physical instability at the frontiers, states aim at stabilizing the mobility of flows by unifying the markets. He claims that geopolitics still remains an important force in international relations. It can be argued that today geopolitics emphasizes more on economic problems. Territorial insecurities are created by vague financial flows and become a threat for politically independent entity (Ibid.).

States are today getting more and more involved in combining national interests with their international economic policies. Power distribution among states is done on the basis of geo economics. Geoeconomically speaking, power is not about a state’s territory, population or military capability. It is also about the industrial strength, access to and control of natural resources and stability of political institutions. A state’s position is dictated more by its industrial strength rather than its geographical position. Two states might not be in geographical proximity but might see each other as rivals on account of industrial incompatibility (Ibid.).

Although nations are still defined in terms of their geographical boundaries, their power can be understood only in terms of their despatialized geo economic terms. For traditional geopoliticians, such as, Mackinder, Haushof er, and Spykman, territorial boundaries were of utmost importance and the categories of heartland, rimland were important. But unlike this, geo economics is about industrial policies. The phenomena of globalization, and regionalization, from above, and non-governmental organizations from below lessen the importance of territorial boundaries (Pollele, 1999).
Matthew Sparke (2007; 2005) also argues that there exists an imagined geography of a decentred global space. A new regime of borderless global empire has come up which is based on deterritorialized imagined geography. This kind of geography encourages geoeconomics. This is a smooth space and is characterized by uncoded flows, networks, transborders and flexibility. This is unlike the second imagined geography, that of geopolitics, which is about unevenness of visions, divisions and partitions. This imagined geography consists of ‘a much rougher-edged national-imperial geopolitics’. Geoeconomics cuts across the divisions of ‘us’ and ‘them’; ‘clashing civilizations’; and ‘rogue’ states or ‘failed’ states (see Sparke, 2007; 2006; 2005).

The second school of thought believes that geoeconomics and geopolitics are moving in tandem with each other. Sparke (1998) claims that the views of neither Luttwak nor Ohmae can be said to be dominant. He argues that both geopolitics and geoeconomics are moving alongside. According to him, military and markets have come closer, thus, manifesting the powerful interplay between the two when practical geopolitical reasoning has to be given shape in the era of globalization. Geopolitics is being reinvented in terms of borders in the context of interdependency. Thus, Sparke is of the view that geopolitics and geoeconomics are not really moving in competition trying to leave the other behind rather the two forces are becoming complementary (Ibid.). To exemplify the complementarity between geopolitics and geoeconomics, Sparke argues that it was the groundless geopolitical fears of existing weapons of Mass destruction (WMD) in Iraq and the groundless geoeconomic hopes of including the Middle East into the free-market capitalist society that led the United States to invade Iraq (2007).

The third school of thought proposes that given the present day situation geoeconomics and geopolitics enter in a conflictual relationship with each other. As argued at some length in chapter three, this is one of the major tensions faced by the economic diplomacy of a country. This creates a deadlock between the two. It can be argued that India-ASEAN relations fall into this category.

Here, some attention should be paid to the thesis propounded by a distinguished geographer, Jean Goattmann (cited in Prevelakis, 2000) who argues that globalization and regionalism or nationalism are complementary to each other rather than conflictual. He argues that iconographies come as result of excessive mobilities or circulation, thus creating a balance between the two. In the present day world, iconographies have a role to play at the regional rather than at the national level (Muscaria, 2005; Prevelakis, 2000). India-ASEAN relations can be seen in this regional context where circulation of capital
is an important aspect. Going by what Gottmann has to say, for the practical success of India’s ‘Look East’ policy, circulation has to take an upper hand over iconography. This circulation or geoeconomics can help overcome geopolitical distance to quite an extent.

In the post-Pokharan times, the strategic elite of India have come up with new geopolitical visions (Mattoo, 2001). This strategic elite comprises the key decision-makers in the political, military and business fields or those likely to occupy important decision-making positions in immediate future. These include—key functionaries of major national political parties and regional parties, senior civil servants in important ministries like the Ministry of External Affairs, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Ministry of Home and Ministry of Finance, some senior armed forces officers, and, prominent academicians and scientists. This group clearly coincides on the paradigm shift in India’s worldview from idealism to realpolitik (Ibid.).

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, critical geopolitics takes into account the dimension of plurality. Multiple sites produce knowledges as suitable to them. As mentioned above, Mattoo (2001) talks about different images of ASEAN among the Indian strategic elite. He argues that ASEAN is emerging as a central pivot in India’s view of Asia. Given the fact that India and ASEAN share some common threats and for the construction of security order, the strategic elite feel that ASEAN occupies a central position in India’s grand strategy (Ibid.). It can be argued that the Prime Minister’s Office, the Ministry of External Affairs and the Ministry of Defence and the Indian armed forces support this view. To quote the Indian External Affairs Minister, Natwar Singh (2005c: Internet Source),

India’s geography imparts a unique position to her in the geopolitics of the Asian continent. Our interests lie not only in different sub-categories of Asia - East Asia, West Asia, Central Asia, South Asia or South East Asia. Our development and security are also intertwined with that of each of these regions... There is a general aspiration to evolve towards a more co-operative strategic and security paradigm – both globally and regionally. It is here that Asia as a whole and East Asia in a more specific sense will have to rise to the challenge. As I said, we are bound together with the destiny of a common neighbourhood. We must also join our energies in overcoming challenges to our common security and pursuing our goal of common prosperity. The emergence of Asia is in reality the sum of the success of each of its parts and the strength of their inter-linkages.
Another strong image of ASEAN in the Indian view is that of an economic space offering opportunities (Mattoo, 2001). It can be argued that this is one of the most important images as seen by the Prime Minister’s Office, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, corporate organizations such as the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM) and think tanks such as Research and Information system for Developing Countries (RIS). This aspect will be discussed in chapter three.

During the third India-ASEAN Business Summit held in New Delhi in 2004, the Indian Prime Minister, Mr. Manmohan Singh, graphically outlining a geoeconomic vision for a ‘Rising India’ and ‘New Asia’, remarked,

A decade ago we unveiled our "Look East" policy. This is more than a political slogan or a foreign policy orientation. It has an economic rationale and commercial content. We wish to "Look East" because of the centuries of interaction between us. This tradition, and our faith in principles of democracy and pluralism, bring us together...Integration is a process that is being driven both by the technological revolution that shrinks distances, and by interconnected populations. This is visible in the proliferation of regional cooperation mechanisms across the globe, including in our region. Therefore, it is only inevitable that we seek to take the existing India-ASEAN relationship to a higher level, where we envision an Asian Economic Community, which encompasses ASEAN, China, Japan, Korea and India. Such a community would release enormous energies. One cannot but be captivated at the vision of an integrated market, spanning the distance from the Himalayas to the Pacific Ocean, linked by efficient road, rail, air and shipping services. This community would constitute an "arc of advantage", across which there would be large-scale movement of people, capital, ideas, and creativity (Singh, 2004d: Internet Source) (emphasis supplied)

The above mentioned text brings out the growing importance of geoeconomics in India’s foreign policy, especially India’s east, creating an ‘arc of advantage’. The economic visions and facets of India-ASEAN relations will be studied at greater length in chapter three. We will explore the extent to which economic diplomacy has become a supplement to the traditional diplomacy in the present day globalizing world. The extent to which India’s ‘Look East’ policy is dictated and driven solely by geoeconomics also needs to be critically examined.
The emphasis on the geoeconomic imperative of the Indian state calls for what C. Raja Mohan calls India’s ‘Look West’ policy. He argues that such a policy can very well complement India’s ‘Look East’ policy. The present Indian government talks of having substantial relationship with West Asia. This region, called as Greater Middle East today, fulfils the everyday increasing energy needs of India and is a huge market for Indian goods, services and skilled manpower (Raja Mohan, 2004a).

Manmohan Singh said in his speech to the Trade and Economic Relations Committee in June 2005 that India must extend her economic relations with wider neighborhood. As India has launched her ‘Look East’ policy, India should also look towards her west. He approved negotiations with individual member countries of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)— United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia for a comprehensive economic cooperation agreement covering services sector and investment (PM Launches India’s Look West Policy, 2005: Internet Source).

The tension between geopolitics and geoeconomics can lead to serious deadlocks, disrupting the national interests. The increased geopolitical distance between the immediate neighbors makes reaching the extended neighborhood almost impossibility. An obvious example of this could be seen in India-West Asia relations. The geopolitical tension with Pakistan makes geographical access to Greater Middle East difficult. C. Raja Mohan (2007; 2004a) is of the view that a substantial ‘Look West’ policy could be in favor of geoeconomic interests of both India and Pakistan and that is the need of the hour.

CONCLUSION

Using critical geopolitical perspectives, this chapter has argued, on the one hand, that the foreign policy discourse, and the practices that flow from it, is not as simple and straightforward as sometimes believed or assumed. Foreign policy (re)orientations are dictated and driven by various competing geopolitical visions of a multitude of actors and institutions within the ‘nation-state’. The terrain of foreign policy, therefore, is rather complex and dynamic. There are a number of competing texts and scripts produced by a number of institutions; vying for greater visibility and attention in the formulation and conduct of ‘foreign’ policy.
A study in the geopolitics of (re)orientation, therefore, should aim at exploring how different institutions/actors construct and impose different maps of meaning on the same foreign policy object or universe. On the other hand, the chapter has started to problematize the thesis propounded by Edward Luttwak and others that geoeconomics is replacing geopolitics in a globalizing world. This chapter, as well as the ones that follow, are based on the assumption that the interplay between the two is rather complex and uncertain; giving rise to a number of possibilities. The tensions between geoeconomics and geopolitics, as far as India-ASEAN relations are concerned, shall be discussed at some length in chapter three. As far as the theory of International Relations in concerned, we have tried to argue and illustrate that a much more nuanced understanding of geopolitical imaginations/visions is needed both by classical realism (which focused on ‘units’) and neo-realism (with its emphasis on structure).

India-ASEAN relations are read differently by different institutions and actors involved. As argued in this chapter, critical geopolitics is about plurality of space rather than singularity. Thus, India-ASEAN relations come to be read differently by Ministry of External Affairs, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM), Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Limited (ONGC- Videsh) and Gas Authority of India Limited (GAIL). What critical geopolitics does is that it takes into account the visions and imaginations of different sites. The chapter to follow makes an attempt to study geopolitical imperatives and imaginations of various sites involved in carrying out India-ASEAN relations. Have these imaginations been converted into implementations and if yes, to what an extent? If not, then what are the hindrances in the way to ‘acting east’? We turn to the next chapter to seek answers to these questions.