CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS

From the foregoing analyses of India and ASEAN diplomatic interactions at the United Nations, it is clear that though the foreign policy objectives are similar in the sense that all of them seek to protect their territorial integrity and independence and that there are no issues of direct conflict or contending interests among them, yet their perceptions of international and regional issues and strategies do differ. These differences have largely been influenced by their respective historical experiences and geopolitical compulsions. These factors acquired an added and complex dimension in the context of the Cold War politics which hitherto had exercised the dominant influence in international relations. Thus, the pro-Western orientation which characterized ASEAN States, came into conflict with India's closer relations with the erstwhile USSR. It was not surprising therefore that respective perceptions of India and ASEAN States on international problems and security matters did acquire divergence and differences.

As of writing this, the international environment is in a state of flux. With the disintegration of the Soviet Union the situation has dramatically changed and
new power-equations are in the offing. Differences on Afghanistan and Cambodia (Kampuchea) are no longer the irritants they were until recently as regards Indo-ASEAN relations and India has already been admitted as a "sectoral-dialogue partner" by ASEAN.

As analysed in the preceding pages, both India and the ASEAN States have had intensive diplomatic interactions at the United Nations on various international issues. Looking back in perspective, but because of their reactions and interactions on critical issues, the differences that existed (during the period which has been the subject of analysis of this study) between India's and ASEAN's perceptions would not have been clearly discernible. That differences and divergences were very much there was brought to focus because of the political processes which characterizes the functioning of the United Nations.

Over the decades, the United Nations, particularly its General Assembly, has gradually become a truly "town-hall meeting of the world" where not only are international problems discussed and debated, but actions, inactions, omissions and commissions of member-States are subjected to scrutiny in terms of
international norms and standards of behaviour. All member-States, howsoever small or mighty, are called upon to explain their conduct, act or commission, and all other States are obliged to stand up and be counted on one side or the other.

There is more to the United Nations process. On all issues taken up for consideration by the UN, member States are called upon to take a position one way or the other. Thus, for instance, on various issues relating to the question of the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace, India and the ASEAN States were called upon to express their views and also to register their votes. It is not just the question of voting "yes" or "no" but "abstention" or "being absent" indicates the position taken by Member States. Indeed, as discussed in chapter five, ASEAN States' abstention, in 1971, on key paragraphs relating to the Declaration on Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace gave an indication, at an early stage, that India and ASEAN have differences in their approach to the question. Similar examples can be cited from interactions on other international problems. The point at emphasis is that interactions at the United Nations have become an important factor in the conduct of diplomacy.

Indeed, the United Nations provides both a forum and a mechanism for the conduct of diplomacy.

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1 Just to cite some recent instances, the United States had to explain its action in Grenada, Nicaragua and Panama. While the Soviet Union had to justify its military intervention in Afghanistan.
India as well as the ASEAN States do make use of the forums and mechanisms of the United Nations. The General Assembly is generally understood to be a place where debates and discussions take place, followed by the adoption of resolutions. But, what goes on backstage is perhaps as important, if not more than, as what happens in full public view. Behind the resolutions adopted is subtle diplomacy, in the form of persuasion, hard bargaining or arms-twisting. It should be noted that the United Nations is in a sense, a permanent international conference and the largest rendezvous of its kind. Governments can feel the pulse of the world through their respective Permanent Missions at New York. Moreover, the large presence of media representatives at the UN headquarters is of great significance in providing information and in influencing public opinion. The public opinion at home, in turn influences diplomatic interactions at the United Nations.

The United Nations is obviously designed to promote the larger interest of mankind, but in actual practice, Member States also make use of the world body to promote their respective foreign policy objectives. They seek through their diplomatic interactions at the United Nations to make their view prevail and to promote their national interest. The irony is that States pursue
their narrow national interest but actually seek justification in terms of the larger humanitarian interest. This is because United Nations' pronouncement carry "political weight", which none can ignore. It performs the important function of what is often referred to as the process of "collective legitimization". Over the years, as the United Nations has developed its role in world politics, it has emerged as the most significant instrument of obtaining international endorsement or otherwise of the claims and/or legitimacy of the actions of States.

It is also an exercise which brings like-minded States together and those of whom who have differences, are also compelled to come together in the forum that the United Nations provides, and so cooperation also gets promoted. Thus, while diplomatic interactions between India and ASEAN States at the United Nations did bring out differences on international issues like Superpower relations and Kampuchea, on other issues such as relating to South Africa and Namibia, a convergence of views could be seen.

The political process of the United Nations represent a struggle among Member States to seek approval, or prevent disapproval, of their actions, claims and policies and to secure disapproval of the position taken
by their antagonists. It is true that such determination of claims and legitimacy is often flouted by those Member States which fail to secure the verdict in their own favour. It is also true that no Government would commit itself to abide by a decision or recommendations of the United Nations which it considers to be adverse to its own national interest. On the other hand, no Government believes that it can afford not to take seriously the political advantages or disadvantages accruing from the decisions and recommendations of the United Nations.

II

Turning to issues of peace and security, it may be noted that by the time the United Nations became an operational system in 1946, the war-time allies had fallen apart. The United States and the Soviet Union emerged as the two Superpowers and the proceedings in the United Nations came to be dominated by Cold War politics. This essentially meant a struggle for political and ideological influence between the Superpowers which succeeded in generally upsetting the international political climate.

The result of this struggle for power was that while Member States could not ignore their own vital interests, very often their actions and interactions
at the United Nations were influenced by the pulls and pressures exerted on them by the Superpowers. This implied that the position a Member State took at the United Nations was not always an independent one, but the result of interplay of various factors, including the pressure from one or the other Superpower.

In spite of the fact that India and ASEAN States have cultural affinity and the similarity of historical experiences, and that they had no issue of bilateral conflict, differences cropped up largely because of the influence of Superpower rivalry. A complex network of military and ideological interests was so juxtaposed as to sow division among neighbouring regions and States. Any quest for improvement of relations between India and ASEAN States would therefore have to take into account the whole gamut of relationships. India and the ASEAN States were used as pawns on the global chess board by the extra-regional Powers.

In the global strategy the Superpowers had been pursuing, South East Asia gained importance. Its strategic position acquired an added dimension, particularly with the conflict situation that prevailed in Vietnam. From the perspective of the United States, developments in the South East Asian region were looked upon as crucial in the context of the policy of containment.
which it pursued during the fifties and the sixties. Events in the Indo-China peninsula, particularly in Vietnam, brought about a change in US strategy, which was partly spelled out in Nixon's Guam doctrine (1969). The emphasis changed from direct US military involvement to greater reliance on a coalition of regional forces to thwart Communist expansionism and subserve US strategic interests.

After the Vietnam War, differences between the two Communist Giants - Soviet Union and China - were further sharpened. While Vietnam remained in the Soviet camp, and China came to support the Pol Pot regime in Kampuchea, USA edged closer to China. In fact, China's attack on Vietnam in early 1979 was in line with the US aim of keeping Soviet-backed Vietnam subdued.

Besides the factors mentioned above, more long term interests motivated US involvement in South East Asia. The six ASEAN States command important maritime routes, such as Straits of Malacca and Singapore, the Lombok Strait and the Sunda Strait which are of crucial significance to the United States - and to Japan - its ally in the Asia-Pacific region.

As compared to the American hold on the region, the Soviet Union failed to assert much influence. Brezhnev's Asian Collective Security idea advocated in
1969 did not attract the ASEAN States. Soviet Union's role in the region was limited to providing support to Vietnam and the negative role of discouraging US and Japanese involvement there and neutralizing any attempts by the Chinese at regional or global influence.

The US objectives in South East Asia were in greater accord with ASEAN interests than they could be with Soviet objectives. Besides the more obvious need for ASEAN to combat the Communist threat, for instance, to a 'frontline State' like Thailand, there were other motivating factors like the need for capital-input and technological know-how together with the need to combat internal insurgency on a continuing basis, which brought ASEAN States closer to the United States.

The kind of close relationship that developed between ASEAN and the United States could not evolve between India and the US. It is true that like South East Asia, South Asia occupies a region of geostrategic interest for both the Superpowers. India as an open society and being the largest democracy in the world, ostensibly had more in common with the United States than with the Soviet Union. Yet, its relationship with the US did not develop into a lasting one because its interests were put in jeopardy as a result of the policy
decisions taken by Washington. For instance, the American bid to develop Pakistan as a bulwark against Soviet communism resulted in that country using its weaponry against India instead (as in 1965). Similarly, India's feeling of insecurity was further heightened by the US rapprochement with China beginning 1971. It was in the context of this growing China-Pakistan-US axis that India decided to respond positively to the Soviet proposal for formal ties of peace and friendship. Soviet Union had made this offer at least as early as in 1969, but it was only in 1971 that India decided to sign the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation. India said that it was merely a friendship treaty, but certainly it was criticized by other countries (including ASEAN Members - Malaysia and Singapore) as a clear move away from India's stance of non-alignment.

The Indo-Soviet Treaty which was more than a non-aggression pact but less than an alliance, kept intact India's vital interest and principles. India did not have to promise Moscow any military bases in return. Here, it may be useful to remember that while the Soviet Union did not have strategic differences with countries following a policy of non-alignment, the US reactions to non-alignment had varied from total opposition to passive acceptance of it.
The quality of the relationship between the ASEAN capitals and Washington was different. The ASEAN States had to, to some extent, compromise their vital interests to accommodate the interests of the Superpowers in the region. While the Philippines, till recently, provided bases to the United States, and another ASEAN Member Thailand has security links with Washington, it was India's policy not to be drawn into military alliances or to provide military bases to any Power. Its support to Soviet Union was principle-based. In return Soviet Union supported India at the United Nations on matters of importance to it, and on at least one occasion supported India with its veto power in the Security Council. While ASEAN States were easily drawn into the American game-plan of preventing the spread of communism, India's approach was different. It considered any kind of extra-regional interference in South and South East Asia as unwarranted and unacceptable. The one exception was with regard to Afghanistan when India was dissuaded from voting against the Soviet Union at the United Nations.

In the fast changing international environment especially with catalytic factors such as disintegration of the Soviet Union and removal of such major irritants between India and ASEAN as the Cambodia problem and the Afghanistan crisis, conditions have been created
which are conducive to a greater coordination of policies of India and ASEAN States. The Superpower rivalry which had so acutely influenced Indo-ASEAN relations in the past, is no longer a factor in international relations.

In contrast with the differences between India and ASEAN States over Superpower relations, on some other international conflict situations, India and ASEAN States took positions which were largely similar. For instance, a conflict situation that has continued to occupy international attention has been the one between the Arabs and the Israelis. Israel and the neighbouring Arab States have been engaged in war several times since 1948. Although a large number of countries supported the right to self-determination of the Palestinian Arabs, at the United Nations, the Jewish State continued to take a defiant stance. Backed by the United States and with the Arabs themselves disunited, Israel has been able to openly defy international public opinion. India, and among the ASEAN States - Indonesia and Malaysia - have supported the Arab cause.²

²Of late there has been a slight moderation in India's policy toward Israel in as much as we have opened full diplomatic relations and are also making efforts to build up trade and strategic links.
Similarly, on the question of apartheid in South Africa and Namibia, the views of India and ASEAN were more or less similar.

Continuing with peace and security issues, it may be noted that perhaps more than anything else, it was the regional conflicts in South and South East Asia that highlighted the significance of diplomatic interactions between India and ASEAN at the United Nations. The diplomatic interactions with regard to issues that were of more immediate concern to them, such as the Indo-Pak War of 1971 and the other regional conflict situations as in East Timor, Afghanistan and Kampuchea (Cambodia) bring out the ups and downs in India-ASEAN relations.

To begin with, the Indo-Pak War of 1971 which culminated in the emergence of Bangladesh as a sovereign, independent State, was one conflict situation where it was difficult to pinpoint the aggressor in terms of the provisions of the UN Charter.

The crisis which had been brewing in Pakistan for some time erupted in 1971 as the Government pursued repressive policies in East Pakistan and the nationalist aspirations of its people were brutally suppressed. Military repression drove many East Pakistanis into India.
The unprecedented influx of ten million refugees from East Pakistan into India, with little prospect of their going back, posed a tremendous strain on India's economy, besides endangering its national security. These developments when viewed in the backdrop of the strained relations between India and Pakistan ever since partition, convinced India of the need for a durable solution to the crisis so close to its borders.

These and other developments such as China's growing hostility towards India, Kissinger's secretive visit to Beijing via Islamabad pushed India into signing the Indo-Soviet Treaty. On the other hand, ASEAN States' close ties with the US, their fear and distrust of the Soviet Union (and its South East Asian ally - Vietnam) made them opt for a pro-Pakistan-China-US approach in their foreign policies. During the Indo-Pak War itself, India discovered that it could not depend on ASEAN's support at the United Nations even as the USS Enterprise moved menacingly in Indian waters, and the number of refugees coming across its borders swelled.

ASEAN States opposed India's position at the United Nations not because they were not appreciate of India's position but because they maintained that the use of force for whatever reasons was not justified.
They did not wish to appear to encourage dissidence, as ethnic communities within their own borders were a potential threat. Besides, it is likely, that Malaysia and Indonesia - with considerable Muslim populations and with some dissident communities of their own could not ignore the demand within their own country to support Pakistan.

Thus, in a conflict which was of great significance to India, the ASEAN States offered no diplomatic support and India had to depend on Soviet Union's backing in the General Assembly and its veto-support in the Security Council.

The reaction of ASEAN States and India to some other regional conflict situations showed that India and ASEAN need not always have antagonistic views. In fact India has had close ties with most South East Asian States, except for a short period during the sixties. But among the ASEAN States it is with Indonesia that India has the closest of ties. Apart from the close historical and cultural ties, India's active support to Indonesia during the freedom struggle and collaboration in initiating the non-aligned movement, bear this point. Indonesia is one State among ASEAN Members which has been the closest to India in its
strategic perceptions, which also explains the similarity of views on the question of East Timor.

When Indonesian forces launched an offensive action against East Timor in December 1975 culminating in its integration as the twenty-seventh province of Indonesia, the General Assembly condemned this action and reaffirmed the inalienable right of the people of East Timor to self-determination and independence. Earlier, India stood by Indonesia and voted against the resolution demanding the withdrawal of Indonesian forces from East Timor. India took this position in the face of Soviet opposition and at a time when all the ASEAN States were not equally supportive of Indonesia's stand. India took a pragmatic view and held that Indonesia's cooperation was important in any settlement of the East Timor problem. Through the years, India has maintained its support of Indonesia.

It was the other regional conflict in South East Asia which united ASEAN States more strongly than any other issue, but on which India chose to differ. The moving in of Vietnamese forces in Kampuchea in December 1978 and the consequent installation of the Heng Samrin regime had been interpreted as a violation of the UN Charter. Vietnam, with the backing of the USSR, was seen as the aggressor. This was the sum of the argument of the ASEAN States on the matter. Among the ASEAN
States themselves, some like Singapore and the 'frontline' State Thailand, were the most vociferous opponents of this intervention.

India perceived the matter differently; it saw China as being primarily responsible for the situation. India contended that before the Vietnamese forces moved in and assisted in the establishment of the Heng Samrin regime, the situation in Kampuchea had already deteriorated considerably, and reports of the genocide that the Pol Pot regime had indulged in, had been confirmed by independent agencies. Besides, border incursions into Vietnamese territory had taken place sporadically. Undoubtedly, it was humanitarian and moral reasons as well as its own national interest which motivated India's pronouncement on the issue. India with its past experience of Chinese belligerence, was opposed to Chinese domination in the region and favoured a strong Vietnam.

India believed that the Khmer Rouge forces, backed by China and active in Kampuchea, should be neutralized and withdrawn. It differed with the ASEAN States in their perception of Vietnam as closely aligned to the Soviet Union and even acting on its behalf. India saw the Vietnamese as a brave nation which had to wage a long and heroic struggle against imperialism; it therefore
had won the right to be recognized as an independent actor in world affairs. However, India also felt that if the West and the ASEAN States adopted a militant approach and pushed Vietnam into a corner, it would be forced to become dependent on the Soviet Union.

The ASEAN States succeeded in securing, with US help, representation to Democratic Kampuchea at the UN. India sought to postpone the issue of Kampuchea's representation at the UN. However, it recognized the Heng Samrin regime because the ASEAN States, toeing the US line not only demanded the withdrawal of Vietnamese forces but also the restoration of the Pol Pot regime.

Though, initially, India's recognition of the Heng Samrin regime attracted severe criticism from the ASEAN States, later the reaction was more tempered. As it turned out, Vietnam withdrew its troops in September 1989, the United States announced an end to its support for the occupancy of the UN seat by Democratic Cambodia and the "Big Five" announced their peace plan in 1991. In the changed situation, however, India was unable to play any important role in bringing peace to Cambodia.

The question of military intervention in Afghanistan was another international problem which brought the differences between India and ASEAN into
sharp focus. The contention of ASEAN States was that India not only failed to condemn the Soviet armed intervention which took place in December 1979 but also its very first statement in the UN General Assembly on the issue amounted to a virtual endorsement of the Soviet action. Later, India supported a political solution to the problem. India's entire stance and behaviour was interpreted by the ASEAN States as pro-Soviet.

The ASEAN States deplored the Soviet Union's armed intervention in Afghanistan and called for the immediate withdrawal of the forces. A resolution in the Security Council condemning the invasion was vetoed by the Soviet Union. The deadlock led to the convening of the Sixth Emergency Special Session of the General Assembly on 10 January 1980. The resolutions which the General Assembly passed, it is significant to note, did not mention the Soviet Union by name. All the five ASEAN States had voted in favour while India had abstained. The December 1979 and subsequent interactions at the United Nations, show that going by India's declared foreign policy objectives, its approach to the Afghanistan problem left much to be desired.

Despite the initial reaction of India, which could be seen to condone the Soviet action, India's subsequent pronouncements showed that it did not approve
of the massive Soviet military presence in Afghanistan. It spoke in favour of a political solution to the problem. Since its threat perception to itself from Soviet Union was low, its real worry rose from the bid the US was making along with China to treat Pakistan as a 'frontline' State, something Pakistan was only too willing to go along with, in view of the large amounts of aid that were being mobilized for it (presumably to cope with the crisis).

Pakistan has always loomed large in India's threat perception because of the circumstances of partition, the ever present communal problems and Pakistan's lining up behind the Western bloc. Hence in the Afghanistan scenario, too, it was Pakistan with the prospect of massive military and monetary aid from the Western countries and the imminent prospect of using this to start a war against India which provided India with its biggest headache. India also probably realized that provoking the Soviet Union by taking a tough stand would not improve subcontinental security in India's favour. As a matter of fact, the Afghanistan events would appear to have magnified the threat perception of India and Pakistan vis-a-vis each other and reinforced the traditional alignments. The ASEAN States, since they were none of them in proximity to the Afghan events would obviously not view the matter in the same light as
India; for them it was more in the nature of a moral stand they could afford to take since they were far removed from the scene of action and unaffected by it directly.

Meanwhile, as a result of intense negotiations under UN auspices and the efforts of the UN Secretary General, withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan was completed in the middle of February 1989.

Turning to arms control and nuclear weapons issues, it must be noted that the divergence between the views of India and ASEAN States has to be viewed in the light of the fact that none of the ASEAN States have reached the threshold of nuclear technology and that the US could provide the protection against any threat. But in India the situation was different. India, despite consistent pressure from the United States and urging from the Soviet Union has not yet signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty, while all the ASEAN States have done so.

India perceives the entire nuclear weapons issue differently from ASEAN. It has a nuclear Power as its neighbour. Both China and India being such large countries the mutuality of apprehensions is great. Then there is Pakistan whose imminent nuclear potential also is a danger to India's security. As such India would not like to foreclose its nuclear option.

Again, that was the reason why when the Pakistani draft resolution proposing that South Asia be declared a
nuclear free zone (GA Res. 3625B) was adopted on 9 December 1974, India decided to oppose it while most ASEAN States voted in favour.

On the related issue of Indian Ocean Zone of Peace, also there are differences between India and the ASEAN States. While ASEAN States have supported the concept, their attitude to it has been quite different from that of India. The ASEAN States have evolved their own concept of Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) which is probably a more versatile diplomatic tool in their dealings with the Superpowers.

India had invariably argued that Zone of Peace should be evolved in the context of Great Power rivalry. It would like to see Great Power rivalry eliminated from the Indian Ocean. India also feels that littoral States should not provide military bases on their territory.

However, the threat perceptions of ASEAN States are somewhat different. Some of the small littoral States belonging to ASEAN, consider it safer to allow a Superpower in the Indian Ocean than to allow a littoral State of the region to emerge as a significant naval Power. ASEAN States have expressed fears about India's naval forces looming large in the zone. One of the smaller ASEAN States, Singapore, is in fact on record to say that Soviet military presence in the Indian Ocean is a
threat to their security whereas the presence of the US fleet is a guarantee of the maintenance of peace and security in the region.

There were other issues relating to Law of the Sea and Antarctica which were not only highly important but also highly complex and technical. Various aspects of each issue were discussed and debated in great detail and quite often States held opposing views on one sub-aspect while agreeing on another. India and ASEAN views differed on Law of the Sea when the interests of 'user-State' were discussed. But, a similarity of views could be discerned with regard to 'common heritage of mankind' concept relating to the seabed and ocean floor underlying the seas beyond national jurisdiction. As countries belonging to developing world, they were under pressure constantly due to scarcity of resources. The unbounded resources from the sea held great potential for these countries.

However, with regard to the Antarctica question there were significant differences between India and the ASEAN States. Among the ASEAN States, Malaysia has spearheaded the movement against the Antarctica Treaty System. It regarded the Treaty System as being "partisan" and serving the interests of select nations. Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir-bin-Mohommad desired a new international agreement under United Nations auspices.
India's views on the matter were different as its interests were different. As it had acquired not only Consultative status but also the rights as a 'pioneer-investor' and sending scientific expeditions regularly besides having a permanent base in Antarctica, India was not in agreement with Malaysia. Malaysia spoke of making Antarctica the common heritage of mankind, which was contrary to India's interests.

From the analyses presented above, it is clear that India and the ASEAN States have divergent security perceptions and their positions on different international issues have oscillated from varied approaches to pursuit of opposite ones.

III

It should be noted that South and South East Asia have been one of the main theatres of international rivalry between the major world Powers. The result is that in each part of the region, the countries acquired extra-regional linkages. A complex web of strategic, military and ideological interests are so juxtaposed as to result in divisions within the subregions and between the Governments of neighbouring countries. It is not surprising, therefore, that India and ASEAN States, although having no bilateral conflicts and tensions,
appeared till recently, to be drifting apart. Indeed, they seemed to be intricately involved as "pawns" in the game of power-politics which the major "outside" Powers were playing in South and South East Asia.

Whatever differences that exist between India and ASEAN are not irreconcilable since they do not so much emanate from any conflicts in terms of national interests. They were largely manifestations of pulls and pressures from extra-regional Powers. The disintegration of Soviet Union, and the consequences have transformed international strategic environment and in the post-Cold War period, India and ASEAN are likely to recognize the reality of interdependence and mutuality of interest.

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