



# A Comprehensive Analysis Between the Act East Policy and the Look West Policy

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## Abstract:

This comprehensive analysis explores the Act East and Look West policies, two distinct foreign policy initiatives pursued by India. The Act East policy seeks to strengthen India's ties with East and Southeast Asia, while the Look West policy is concerned with fostering ties with nations in the Middle East and the larger West Asian region. The analysis examines the key objectives, strategies, and components of each policy, including economic cooperation, connectivity, strategic engagement, energy security, trade relations, and security collaboration. It emphasises the regional focus, importance, and desired effects of these programmes, highlighting the many circumstances and priorities connected to each. By taking a critical look at the Act East policy and the Look West policy, this analysis aims to shed light on how India's foreign policy is changing and how these initiatives help India get involved in the region and the world. This will help people understand India's strategic goals in East and Southeast Asia, as well as in the Middle East and West Asia.

**Keywords:** Indian Foreign Policy, Act East Policy, Look West Policy, Southeast Asia, West Asia, FTA, GCC, ASEAN.

## Introduction:

India's foreign policy has changed a lot in the last few years. The Act East policy and the Look West policy are two examples of strategic efforts that have been put in place. Through these policies, India is taking a proactive approach to working with strategic areas like East and Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and West Asia. In 1992, former Indian Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao initiated the Look East policy. According to the Act East policy, which replaced the Look East policy in 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi wants to strengthen economic, military, and cultural ties with East and Southeast Asian countries, and the four C's—culture, Commerce, Connectivity, and Capacity building—are the cornerstones of India's Act East Policy.

The Look West strategy, on the other hand, aims to improve India's relationships with countries in the Middle East and the rest of West Asia. With Prime Minister Narendra Modi's remarks at the 'Make in India' conference in New Delhi on September 26, 2014, when he said, "For a long time, the Look East policy has been under discussion; I would like to talk about Link West," the "Look West" policy assumed significance and focused attention on India's policy approach. Since then, Indian policy and diplomatic outreach have made the region a priority, and the "Look West" policy has emerged as a shining example of Indian policy endeavour, ushering in a multifaceted engagement. The Look-West Policy of India: A 9-Point Agenda—Energy security comes first, followed by economic cooperation, security coordination, maritime security, cultural exchanges, engagement of the diaspora, humanitarian cooperation, diplomatic outreach, and multilateral engagement. This has led to increased interaction, improved trade and economic relations, and the commencement of FTA negotiations with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations.

Both measures show that India is becoming more aware of the economic, strategic, and cultural importance of these areas and wants to work with them more closely. The Look West policy recognises the importance of the Middle East and West Asia in terms of energy security, economic cooperation, and security collaboration. The Act East policy tries to take advantage of the economic opportunities in the dynamic East Asian area. The goal of this comprehensive analysis is to make comparisons in great detail between the Act East policy and the Look West policy. It will look into the goals, strategies, and key parts of each policy, analysing their regional focuses, connectivity initiatives, and strategic involvement efforts.

## Research Method:

This comprehensive analysis of the Act East and Look West policies has been explained using descriptive and analytical methods. In order to meet the objective, a Mixed method was used. The data obtained during the study has been shown by using books, journals, articles, research papers from various research institutes and think-tanks, and documents related to regional and global geopolitics and their perception by Indian policymakers and political leadership.

## Objectives:

The primary objective of this comprehensive analysis is to conduct a comparative examination of the Act East policy and Look West policy pursued by India. The analysis aims to achieve the following specific objectives:

- ❖ Comprehend the primary objectives and motivations behind the Act East and Look West policies.
- ❖ Examine the regional emphasis and importance of each policy, including the East and Southeast Asian region targeted by the Act East policy and the Middle East/West Asian region highlighted by the Look West policy.
- ❖ Analyse the economic aspects of the two policies, including trade relations, investment opportunities, and cooperation sectors.
- ❖ Analyse the strategies and initiatives utilised by each policy to improve physical and digital connectivity with the respective target regions.
- ❖ Examine the strategic engagement efforts of both policies, including defence cooperation, maritime security, and partnerships to address regional security issues.
- ❖ Evaluate the effects and outcomes of the Act East policy and Look West policy on India's foreign relations, including the strengthening of diplomatic ties, the projection of influence, and India's overall positioning in the regions of focus.

### Act East Policy: Objectives and Implementation

The objective of India's Act East foreign policy initiative is to strengthen ties with East and Southeast Asian countries. As part of a comprehensive comparison between the Act East and Look West policies, this section primarily focuses on the Act East policy's objectives and implementation strategies.

#### Objectives of the Act East Policy:

- ❖ **Economic Cooperation:** The Act East policy aims to strengthen economic cooperation and encourage trade and investment between India and East Asian and Southeast Asian nations. It seeks to capitalise on the economic opportunities presented by the region's dynamic economies, promote the transfer of technology, and strengthen economic ties for mutual benefit.
- ❖ **Strategic Engagement:** An additional objective of the Act East policy is to cultivate strategic partnerships and deepen security cooperation with nations in the Indo-Pacific region. It recognises the region's growing strategic importance and seeks to preserve peace, stability, and prosperity through defence cooperation, joint exercises, and capacity development.
- ❖ **Connectivity:** The Act East policy stresses the need to strengthen physical and digital connectivity between India and East Asian and Southeast Asian nations. It focuses on building infrastructure, enhancing transport connections, and promoting digital connectivity in order to facilitate trade, tourism, and intercultural exchanges.

#### Implementation of the Act East Policy:

- ❖ **Diplomatic Outreach:** Through high-level visits, bilateral conversations, and involvement in regional forums, India has increased its diplomatic engagement with countries in East and Southeast Asia. The policy aimed to strengthen political and diplomatic ties, share expertise, and promote discourse on regional and global issues.
- ❖ **Trade and Investment Promotion:** The Act East strategy prioritises trade and investment promotion through participation in regional economic forums such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the pursuit of free trade agreements (FTAs). Its goals include lowering trade barriers, encouraging investment, and exploring new areas of economic cooperation.
- ❖ **Infrastructure Development:** The Act East policy acknowledges the significance of infrastructure in improving connectivity. To promote physical connection and economic integration, India has launched projects such as the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway and the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project.
- ❖ **People-to-People Exchanges:** Cultural diplomacy and people-to-people exchanges are important components of the Act East policy. It includes fostering educational collaborations, enabling tourism, and organising cultural events to develop mutual understanding and strengthen ties between India and countries in East and Southeast Asia.

### Look West Policy: Objectives and Implementation

India's Look West policy is a strategic foreign policy initiative that focuses on developing ties with countries in the Middle East and the broader West Asian area. The policy was introduced in 2016 and has been in effect since then. Within this area of the all-encompassing research, we explore the objectives of the Look West strategy as well as its implementation tactics.

#### Objectives of the Look West Policy:

- ❖ **Energy Security:** One of the primary objectives of the Look West policy is to make sure that India has a steady and safe supply of energy. The Middle East is a major source of oil and natural gas, and the policy wants to strengthen energy cooperation, diversify energy sources, and get long-term energy contracts with countries in the region.
- ❖ **Economic and Trade Cooperation:** The Look West policy aims to strengthen economic and trade ties with countries in the Middle East. It wants to increase trade between the two countries, bring in more investments, and look for ways to work together in areas like infrastructure, building, information technology, health care, and agriculture.
- ❖ **Security Collaboration:** The strategy puts a lot of focus on security cooperation and efforts to stop terrorism. India and a few Middle Eastern countries are both worried about extremist groups, and India wants to improve sharing of information, joint operations, and cooperation to fight terrorism and radicalization.

#### Implementation of the Look West Policy:

- ❖ **Bilateral Engagements:** India has strengthened diplomatic connections with Middle Eastern countries through high-level visits, bilateral agreements, and institutional engagement structures. To improve cooperation across sectors, regular discussions and joint commissions have been formed.
- ❖ **Economic Partnerships:** Economic and trade partnerships have been prioritised under the Look West policy. To encourage trade liberalisation and investment flows, India has negotiated free trade agreements (FTAs) and bilateral investment treaties (BITs) with Middle Eastern countries.

- ❖ **Energy Cooperation:** The Look West policy has resulted in significant energy relationships with major Middle Eastern oil-producing countries. India has pursued long-term contracts, invested in energy infrastructure projects, and investigated renewable energy cooperation.
- ❖ **Security Cooperation:** To address common security concerns such as terrorism, extremism, and maritime security, India has increased security cooperation with Middle Eastern countries. To boost security ties, intelligence-sharing procedures, cooperative military exercises, and capacity-building programmes have been formed.

### Comparative Analysis: Act East Policy and Look West Policy

The Look West policy and the Act East policy are two distinct Indian foreign policy initiatives, each with its own regional focus and objectives. This comparative analysis intends to provide a thorough evaluation of the Act East policy and Look West policy, highlighting their similarities, differences, and implications for India's foreign policy.

#### 1. Regional Focus:

- ❖ **Act East Policy:** The purpose of the Act East policy is to broaden India's interaction with the nations that are located in East and Southeast Asia. The strategy's primary focus is on East Asia. It acknowledges the economic vitality and strategic significance of the Indo-Pacific region, and it works to encourage economic cooperation, connectivity, and strategic relationships in this region.
- ❖ **Look West Policy:** On the other hand, Look West Policy focuses on the West Asian region as a whole in addition to the Middle East as its primary focus. It recognises the relevance of the nations in this region as key oil suppliers and strategic partners, and it places an emphasis on energy security, economic cooperation, and security.

#### 2. Economic Cooperation:

- ❖ **Act East policy:** The objective of the Act East policy is to capitalise on the economic opportunities offered by East and Southeast Asia. It seeks to increase trade, attract investments, and facilitate the transfer of technology in sectors such as manufacturing, infrastructure, agriculture, and information technology.
- ❖ **Look West Policy:** The Look West policy emphasises economic and commercial cooperation with Middle Eastern nations. It seeks to diversify commerce, attract investments, and promote collaboration in sectors including infrastructure, construction, information technology, healthcare, and agriculture. partnerships with the countries in this region.

#### 3. Connectivity:

- ❖ **Act East policy:** The Act East policy places a heavy emphasis on physical and digital connectivity with East and Southeast Asian nations. It aims to strengthen transport links, develop maritime routes, and enhance digital connectivity in order to facilitate trade, tourism, and inter-human interactions.
- ❖ **Look West Policy:** Additionally, the Look West policy acknowledges the significance of connectivity. It seeks to bolster transport connections, promote air connectivity, and investigate opportunities for maritime cooperation with Middle Eastern nations.

#### 4. Strategic Engagement:

- ❖ **Act East policy:** The strategic significance of the Indo-Pacific is acknowledged by the Act East policy. It seeks to intensify defence and security cooperation, including joint military exercises and partnerships, with nations such as Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, and Singapore. Freedom of navigation and maritime security are central components of this policy.
- ❖ **Look West Policy:** The Look West policy prioritises counterterrorism and security collaboration with Middle Eastern nations. It emphasises intelligence sharing, joint operations, and capacity development in order to address shared security challenges, such as terrorism, extremism, and maritime security.

#### 5. Energy Security:

- ❖ **Act East policy:** Although the Act East policy acknowledges the significance of energy resources in the Indo-Pacific, energy security is not its primary objective.
- ❖ **Look West Policy:** Energy security is a major component of the Look West policy. By engaging with major oil-producing nations in the Middle East, it seeks to assure a stable and diversified energy supply.

#### 6. Impact on India's Foreign Relations:

Both policies have had a significant effect on India's international relations:

- ❖ **Act East policy:** The Act East policy has strengthened India's economic ties, strategic alliances, and cultural exchanges with East and Southeast Asian nations. It has also increased India's presence in regional forums, such as ASEAN, and strengthened India's position in the Indo-Pacific region.
- ❖ **Look West Policy:** The Look West policy has increased economic cooperation, energy alliances, and security partnerships between India and Middle Eastern nations. It has improved India's access to energy resources, increased trade volumes, and bolstered security connections.

### Importance of Geopolitical Elements:

Geopolitical factors play a significant role in shaping and influencing India's Act East and Look West policies. This section of the exhaustive analysis examines the influence of geopolitical factors on these policies and their implications for India's foreign relations.

1. **Regional Power Structure:** Act East policy and Look West policy are profoundly influenced by geopolitical factors, such as regional power structures. The rise of China as a regional power and its increasing assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific motivate India's engagement with East and Southeast Asia under the Act East policy. India seeks to bolster strategic alliances and counterbalance China's influence by expanding economic cooperation and fostering security collaborations with regional nations. India's engagement with the Middle East is similarly influenced by regional power rivalries,

conflicts, and alliances, which have implications for India's energy security, security cooperation, and diplomatic engagements.

2. **Economic Interests:** In addition, geopolitical factors influence India's economic interests in its Act East and Look West policies. India aims to capitalise on the economic opportunities presented by the dynamic economies of East and Southeast Asia through its Act East policy. This region contains swiftly expanding markets, supply chains, and investment opportunities. In contrast, the Look West policy is motivated by India's energy security concerns, given the Middle East's substantial oil and gas reserves. India's pursuit of energy partnerships and investments in the Middle East is affected by geopolitical factors like regional conflicts, sanctions, and global energy dynamics.
3. **Maritime Security:** Maritime security-related geopolitical factors are vital to both the Act East policy and the Look West policy. India's Act East policy seeks to maintain maritime security and guarantee freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific region, which is becoming increasingly contested as a result of territorial disputes and power projection by various actors. The need to safeguard India's maritime interests and maintain a rules-based order influences India's strategic engagements and defence cooperation in the region. In its Look West policy, India prioritises maritime security as it endeavours to protect its energy supply routes, secure sea lanes, and collaborate with Middle Eastern nations to combat maritime threats and piracy.
4. **Multilateralism and Alliances:** In its Act East policy and Look West policies, India's approach to multilateralism and alliances is influenced by geopolitical factors. In its Act East policy, India participates actively in regional forums such as ASEAN and seeks to establish partnerships through mechanisms such as the East Asia Summit and the Quad. India's engagement with these multilateral platforms is influenced by geopolitical factors, such as the need to counterbalance China's influence and advance India's strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific. Similarly, under the Look West policy, India engages with regional organisations such as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and investigates alliances and partnerships to address security challenges and safeguard its interests in the Middle East.

#### Conclusion:

The comprehensive analysis of the Act East policy and the Look West policy provides valuable insight into India's East and West Asian foreign policy strategy. These policies reflect India's strategic efforts to increase engagement, foster economic cooperation, improve connectivity, and fortify strategic partnerships in these regions. The Act East policy focuses on East and Southeast Asia. To balance China's influence and advance India's interests, it places a strong emphasis on economic collaboration, connectivity, and strategic engagement. The Look West policy, on the other hand, is centred on the Middle East and motivated by worries about the security of the oil supply as well as the necessity of regional economic and security cooperation.

The lessons acquired from the implementation of these policies provide India's foreign policy strategy with invaluable insights. Among the most important lessons are the significance of tailoring foreign policy initiatives to the unique requirements of each region, prioritising economic diplomacy, enhancing connectivity, and forming strategic partnerships. Overall, the Act East policy and Look West policy represent India's strategic efforts to expand its influence, promote economic growth, and resolve significant regional challenges. These policies reflect India's awareness of the changing geopolitical environment, economic opportunities, and security dynamics in East and West Asia. By capitalising on the unique opportunities in each region and addressing its specific requirements and challenges, India can further strengthen its position as a regional and global player, thereby contributing to peace, stability, and prosperity in East and West Asia and beyond.

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