

---

# LSA, CISMOA, and BECA: The Future of US-India Defence Ties

Bhupesh Jain

Immediately after gaining independence, India asked a few countries, including the USA for military aid. The USA provided India with 200 Sherman tanks and 54 Fairchild Packet aircraft; however, the request for 200 fighter aircraft was turned down. This, in a way, sums up, how the Indo-US relations would be for the next few decades. India's subsequent drift towards non-alignment and Pakistan's joining of the treaty alliances crafted by the USA against Communism, led to a cooling of Indo-US ties. Provision of frontline military equipment to Pakistan and its use against India in 1965 and 1971, the signing of the Treaty of Friendship between India and the erstwhile USSR, and the testing of a nuclear device by India in 1974 caused the Indo-US relationship to become near adversarial. In all this, if there was a silver lining, it was the people-to-people contacts. The USA was popular among Indians and Indian professional doctors, engineers and, particularly, software engineers were slowly changing the perceptions of Americans about Indians.

Post the break-up of the erstwhile USSR, the USA reached out to India in the form of the Kicklighter Proposals in 1991.<sup>1</sup> A defence cooperation framework was set up towards Service-to-Service exchanges,

---

Major General **Bhupesh Jain** (Retd) is Senior Fellow (Veteran), Centre for Land Warfare Studies, New Delhi and was Defence Attaché, Embassy of India, Washington DC, from 2009-12.

which included joint exercises between the militaries of the two countries. In 1995, the Defence Policy Group was added as an umbrella to provide policy guidelines to the Services and technical groups.<sup>2</sup> The US armed forces engaged the Indian Army on its experience in counter-insurgency and high altitude warfare. Indo-US military-to-military cooperation, at present, has expanded to comprise 13 Policy and Working Groups and 11 sets of exercises, held at varying frequencies.

At the end of the 1990s, the inventory of the Indian armed forces was mostly of Eastern Bloc origin, with a relatively lower technical threshold. Russia, the successor state of the USSR, was in turmoil. The support for some of the key equipment and weapons for the armed forces had practically dissipated. The Indian economy was showing signs of rebounding and threats from across the borders were escalating. With a virtually non-existent defence industry, India was looking forward to receiving high-end technology quickly and at competent prices from the USA. This has proven to be a mirage, barring a few exceptions. India has been able to add to its transport fleet, but at a steep price. The US defence industry functions very differently, and the US government, right from the outset, struck a hard bargain. India's decision to go nuclear in 1998 further added to the challenges for Indo-US defence ties. The USA sought from India the signing of the foundational agreements. India was unwilling to give up its strategic autonomy or tie itself down completely to the US geopolitical narrative. Neelam Deo has underscored the importance that India attaches safeguarding its national interests by saying: "India is a big country, with its own strategic objectives and imperatives and it will act on opportunities where interests converge, as it has done in the past."

### **Foundational Agreements**

The US has four "foundational" agreements that it signs with its defence partners. The Pentagon describes the agreements as "routine instruments

that the US uses to promote military cooperation with partner-nations”. American officials have stated that the agreements are not prerequisites for bilateral defence cooperation, but would make it simpler and more cost-effective to carry out defence activities. The details of these agreements and their status in the Indo-US context are given in the succeeding paras.

*General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA)* This agreement enables sharing of military intelligence between the two countries and requires each country to protect the other’s classified information. It was signed between India and the USA in 2002.

*Logistic Support Agreement (LSA)* The LSA permits the militaries to use each other’s bases for resupply and repairs. India signed a modified version of the same called the Logistic Exchange Memorandum of Understanding (LEMOA). The LEMOA<sup>3</sup> does not make the provision of logistic support binding on either country and requires individual clearance for each request.

*Communication and Information Security Memorandum of Agreement (CISMOA)* This agreement enables the two countries to share communication and exchange information on approved equipment during bilateral and multinational training exercises and operations.

*Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geospatial Intelligence (BECA)* The BECA permits the exchange of unclassified and controlled unclassified geospatial products, topographical, nautical and aeronautical data, products and services between India and the US National Geospatial Agency.

## **Impact of Geography on Indo-US Defence Relations**

India is a landmass jutting into the Indian Ocean and Southern India is a peninsula, with the sea on three sides. Northern India is a landmass, with land borders with Pakistan, China, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Myanmar. India has a land frontier of 15,106.7 km and a coastline of 7,516.6 km. The USA, on the other hand, has vast oceans to its east

and west, and shares land borders with only two countries, Mexico and Canada. The geopolitical equations of India and the USA are vastly different with their neighbours.

Sir Halford J Mackinder, in his seminal works on the Heartland Theory pointed out that the Heartland was the most advantageous geopolitical location.<sup>4</sup> Fredrick Jackson Turner, in his essay “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” in 1893 said that Westward migration across the continent closed the ‘American Frontier’. The USA then had to look overseas for economic opportunities and markets. Alfred Thayer Mahan in his seminal work “The Influence of Sea Power upon History” complemented the work of Turner by arguing that naval strength paved the way for the emergence of Great Britain as dominant power in the world.<sup>5</sup>

Till the middle of the 17th century, India faced threats across its western borders, followed by threats from the European maritime powers due to lack of adequate maritime capabilities. In the 21st century, India faces threats from the west, north (modern technology having helped China overcome the challenges posed by the altitude of the Himalayas), and in the maritime domain. India needs to work with the USA, the strongest maritime power in the world, to ensure its maritime security. At the same time, it has to prevent threats emerging across its land frontiers. Pakistan has established an axis with China and is attempting to integrate Russia into the same. Russia continues to be a strong continental power, willing to project power across its frontiers to deter hostile powers from occupying the ‘pivot’ of the Eurasian landmass. It is imperative for India’s security to prevent Russia (till it is a military power) to become part of any anti-India alignment. The USA has to understand the challenges faced by India across its land frontiers from the Eurasian landmass and has to work with India to come up with innovative solutions to weaken the Sino-Pak nexus for strengthening Indo-US ties, alongwith the need for India to continue to engage with Russia.

## **Indo-US Relations: 2004 to 2016**

The 'New Framework for the India-US Defence Relationship' was signed by the two sides on June 28, 2005. Both sides agreed to pursue mutually beneficial defence cooperation through security dialogues, Service-level exchanges, defence exercises and defence trade and technology transfer, and collaboration. The signing of the nuclear deal between President George W Bush and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh followed in July 2005 and it<sup>6</sup> provided an impetus to better Indo-US relations. President Obama, successor to President Bush, had a number of India friendly political appointees in both the State Department and Pentagon in his first Administration. A number of steps were taken towards progressing Indo-US relations.<sup>7</sup> Substantive progress on the defence relations between the two countries, however, remained elusive. Through the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) years, AK Antony, India's Defence Minister, stood like a rock against closer military links with the USA.<sup>8</sup> The Ministry of Defence (MoD) Joint Secretary (Planning and International Cooperation [JS (PIC)]) in India would stonewall scores of proposals discussed during the various bilateral visits between the two countries at various levels even if they were of considerable value to the nation. The US Special Forces' offer to train Indian Army Battlefield Nursing Assistants (BFNAs) in saving lives and imparting skills to carry out 'sensitive site exploitation' for harnessing valuable information from terrorism sites was ignored by the MoD. The Pentagon, although focussed upon the signing of the remaining foundational agreements, was willing to move at the pace comfortable to India. Mr Robert Gates, Secretary Defence, and his team made multiple trips to India and engaged the Indian leadership, but without success.

In the summer of 2012, Leon Panetta the new Secretary Defence, visited India to deepen the defence ties.<sup>9</sup> He adopted a different approach, saying that he had come to listen to the Indians. The US had decided to "pivot" or "re-balance" to Asia and the rising China was becoming

assertive along the Himalayas and was providing indications of aggressive maritime intent in both the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean.<sup>10</sup> The Indian side brought out that the USA was difficult to work with in the defence capability and technological sectors. Panetta returned to the USA and stated, “Defense cooperation between the United States and India is a strategic priority for both nations, but the pace and scope of cooperation on defense technology and trade has been impeded by differing bureaucratic processes and legal requirements”. He directed the Deputy Secretary of Defence, from 2011 to 2013, Ashton Carter to “undertake an initiative to provide increased US senior level oversight and engagement to get beyond these obstacles”.<sup>11</sup> Keith Webster, a seasoned veteran of the US Department of Defence (DoD) and an Assistant Secretary of State, was tasked to lead the initiative. The work started in January 2013, in all earnest, to advance Indo-US defence relations. The effort was originally known as the Carter Initiative. Over time, it emerged as the Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI).<sup>12</sup> The expectations and value placed in the DTTI are reflected in the seniority of its leadership. For the United States, the Undersecretary of Defence leads the initiative for acquisition and sustainment. In addition, there is a joint US-India DTTI Interagency Task Force (DIATF) co-chaired by the Director for International Cooperation and a senior Lieutenant General (DCIDS PP&FD) from Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff (HQ IDS). The US DoD also established the India Rapid Reaction Cell (IRRC) in January 2015 to focus exclusively on advancing the DTTI.<sup>13</sup>

When Carter returned to Pentagon as Secretary Defence, after Panetta, in 2014, a review of US government policies was undertaken, and by the middle of 2016, the US claimed that India was now at par with some of its closest allies in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Secretary Carter framed this change in the context of the US rebalancing to Asia, but also within Asia – from “existing partnerships in Northeast Asia” to “new bilateral and multilateral collaboration in Southeast Asia

and elsewhere.”<sup>14</sup> By designating India as a major defence partner, the USA committed itself to work towards facilitating technology sharing with India to a level commensurate with its closest allies and partners.

The United States and India launched a new bilateral Maritime Security Dialogue in April 2016. In June 2016, a joint statement released at the conclusion of the final bilateral summit between President Obama and Prime Minister Modi, recognised India as a major defence partner. In end August 2016, Manohar Parrikar, visited the Pentagon and signed the LEMOA. He also announced that India would sign the remaining foundational agreements in due course. This was the first time that India had made such a commitment publicly. In the past, particularly in the UPA era, Indian National Security Advisors (NSAs) gave such assurances in private many times. Carter stated at the signing ceremony that “the first handshake between India and the USA was strategic, as the US rebalances to the Asia-Pacific, and India extends its reach towards the East. The second handshake is technological and is demonstrated in DTTI. These two handshakes have brought the two militaries together”.

As a follow-up, the US Congress passed the National Defence Authorisation Act (NDAA) for the fiscal year 2017, which included recognition of India as a major defence partner. This Act legally codifies in US law, the changed status of Indo-US ties.<sup>15</sup>

## **The Way Ahead**

The US could consider broadening the language of the International Traffic in Arms Regulation (ITAR) to bring India at par with some of its closest allies. A political appointee at the Pentagon, designated to nurture this relationship, could be appointed. He would be accountable to both the US Congress and White House towards devoting sufficient energy and time to ensure progress.

It is understood that a number of projects are being moved forward under DTTI on different verticals. The Indian Defence Ministry had

shortlisted five possible areas for cooperation: naval guns, mine scattering anti-tank vehicles, unmanned aerial surveillance system, Javelin missiles, and aircraft landing systems for carriers.<sup>16</sup> The Jet Engine Technology Joint Working Group and Joint Working Group on Aircraft Carrier Technology Cooperation are functioning.<sup>17</sup> In support of ‘Make in India’, the United States has shared two proposals to bolster India’s suite of fighter aircraft.<sup>18</sup> Agreements on “atmospheric sciences for high energy lasers, cognitive tools for target detection, small intelligent unmanned aerial systems, and blast and blunt traumatic brain injury have been made.<sup>19</sup>

News reports emerging in mid-March 2018, from Washington DC as well as New Delhi indicate that during the visit of the Indian Defence Secretary to the Pentagon, certain decisions have been made to further deepen defence ties between the two nations. India will deploy an attaché in the US Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT). NAVCENT’s area of responsibility includes the Red Sea, Gulf of Oman, Persian Gulf and Arabian Sea. It is also the lead player in anti-piracy operations. As Indo-US strategic interests continue to converge in the Indian Ocean and Indo-Pacific, maritime security has emerged as a key area of cooperation. India and the US have agreed to increase the scope and participation level of amphibious and naval exercises. The Pentagon has also agreed to have a military representative at the Defence Innovation Unit Experimental (DIUx), a US government unit that funds private companies working on cutting edge defence technologies. The representative in DIUx will gain first-hand experience on how the Pentagon and private sector work together.

India would have to make the USA understand the direction in which it views the defence relationship trajectory needs to be headed. This could not only be based on transfer of technology from the USA or its allies. The rise of China, and the issue of China seeking bases in Djibouti, Maldives, Sri Lanka and Pakistan raise intrinsic challenges in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) for both India and the USA. India would need to

share the objectives with the USA to help in advancing the relationship. It has to be understood that the technology release process in the USA is governed by how its allies want it to. Would India seek interoperability only towards the maritime domain or go further or do less?

The Trump Administration has clearly stated in the National Security Strategy its intent to expand defence and security cooperation with India. India has the opportunity to take advantage of the same. India has recently signed a key agreement with Oman with which the USA has close ties. Such agreements between India and a few other countries in the region would help India's quest for maritime security. US support for such endeavours would be helpful.

### **Likely Impediments to Better Indo-US Relations**

Robert Boggs feels that the US "overestimates both India's desire to improve the relationship and the benefits doing so would bring".

The USA would have to overcome serious obstacles in Delhi to sign the CISMOA and BECA, two agreements that the US deems necessary for certain aspects of technology transfer. India's refusal to sign these agreements meant that the sophisticated P-8I Poseidon maritime surveillance aircraft purchased by India were "delivered without secure and encrypted communications, and satellite navigational aids."<sup>20</sup> While signing the deal for the C 17, C 130J and P-8I Poseidon aircraft, India had accepted that it would sign the foundational agreements and had made the payments accordingly. However, when the aircraft were being fitted, and India had not yet signed the necessary agreements, modifications had to be made to these aircraft. India made additional payments for the same. When the C 130J was to depart for India, a day prior to the departure, US Air Force and Lockheed Martin refused to provide the necessary geospatial data for the journey. It required vigorous intervention by the Indian Embassy to resolve the issue in a timely manner.

India has partnership programmes with Russia on a number of next generation military capabilities. Russia is the “adversary” for the USA. The USA is likely to be hesitant in sharing critical technology with India for fear of it falling into Russian hands.<sup>21</sup> A significant part of the US legislature and executive, besides the people, is hostile to Russia. India is in the process of signing a deal with Russia for the S 400. This is likely to alarm Washington and impact the inclusion of additional sensitive projects in the DTTI.

At the beginning of March 2018, two Chinese scholars had an exchange in a think-tank in Delhi. One of them stated, “China perceives India to be the frontline state of the USA”. China’s conduct at the UN and Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) indicates as much. During the UPA regime, India was hesitant in its engagement with the USA so as to not antagonise China. China will continue the endeavour to block the Indo-US relations. Russia is always ready to play a spoiler for the USA. Its Comprehensive National Power (CNP) does not allow it to directly challenge the USA. All three (the USA, Russia and China) have significant resources for information statecraft. All three countries would be “participating” in India’s general elections in 2019. The results of the 2019 elections in India could impact the trajectory of Indo-US relations. India has to caution China that its abrasive behaviour may compel an Indian decision on seeking interoperability with the USA.

The USA has designated China, along with Russia, as a revisionist power in its National Security Strategy.<sup>22</sup> President Trump has taken steps to reset US trade relations with China. Notwithstanding Chinese assertions, China is no position to risk a protracted trade war with the USA and may for the present make peace with the USA. The difficulty is that once such things start, the end cannot be predicted. Such a trade war may include India too and impact defence trade relations between India and the USA. The US is crafting a quad comprising the US, India, Japan and Australia to counter the Chinese in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>23</sup> However, the

interests of each are different. The idea at present is in a nascent stage. Each of the other three has considerable economic interests entwined with China. India, therefore, may be willing to negotiate should China review its outlook towards India. India has recently reviewed its engagement policy with His Holiness the Dalai Lama.<sup>24</sup> Hopefully, it is as a *quid pro quo* and not *suo moto*. The US economy has shown resilience for the last few years. The unemployment rate is low and wages have started showing firming up trends. The interest rates are going up in the US. Wall Street after a sustained boom, is showing bearish trends. Any slowdown in the economies could make both governments hold out on the foundational agreements, possibly due to domestic reasons, for better deals.

India has had old civilisational ties with Iran. In the face of Pakistani intransigence in providing routes to India and Afghanistan for direct trade, Iran is crucial for India not only for reaching out to Afghanistan but also to Central Asia. India's agreement on Chabahar port is, therefore, crucial for India. The Iranians are currently active in a number of hot spots in the Gulf and West Asia; and are working in tandem with Russia. The Iran nuclear deal was a sideshow to allow Iran to be a US partner in fighting the Islamic State (IS). Now that the IS has been defeated, the USA is no longer interested in the agreement. Ever since the fall of King Raza Pahlavi and the rise of the current government, US-Iran relations have been defined by mutual hostility, proxy wars and threats. Indo-Russian relations have been, and may continue to be, an irritant in Indo-US relations, including defence relations.

## **Conclusion**

The revival of the Indo-US relationship post the break-up of the erstwhile USSR was led by the US-Pacific Combatant Command Commander Adm Kicklighter by initiating closer military-to-military ties between the two countries. Currently, more than 50 engagements between India and the USA are ongoing in different fields. Many terms are used to describe

Indo-US relations, i.e., ‘natural allies’, ‘match between two largest democracies,’ etc. The USA has never really cared about the ideological inclinations of its partners; it only cares about its own interests. The US foreign policy is governed by power politics, and not ideological choices: Saudi Arabia is both undemocratic and religiously radical; a military dictator runs Egypt; Turkey and Pakistan underwent military coups.

India has been providing many indicators of its emergence. However, on occasions, ideological issues have constrained its pragmatism. Hopefully that is a thing of the past. India needs partners to confront the assertive foreign policy being pursued by China. Closer Indo-US defence relations are one such choice. India could sign the remaining two foundational agreements and prepare its armed forces for interoperability with the USA and its allies. The Chinese would only have themselves to blame for their aggression along the Himalayas, in international bodies, and the IOR, which may lead to the shaping of India’s decisions. India has to make the USA understand its compulsions to continue its engagement with Russia. Russian-American ties would remain adversarial, in the short to medium terms. The USA has laid out its vision; it is India which has to make pragmatic choices.

## Notes

1. <http://www.orfonline.org/research/india-us-defence-relations-a-close-look-at-the-emerging-realities/>
2. Ibid.
3. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-usa-military/u-s-india-sign-military-logistics-agreement-idUSKCN114241>
4. <https://www.silkroadstudies.org/resources/pdf/Monographs/1006Rethinking-4.pdf>
5. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1866-1898/mahan>
6. <https://www.cfr.org/backgroundunder/us-india-nuclear-deal>
7. <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/how-obama-revived-us-indian-relations-16473>
8. <https://thewire.in/external-affairs/india-is-making-up-for-lack-of-vision-by-bandwagoning-with-the-us>
9. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-india-defence/panetta-calls-for-deep-u-s-india-defense-ties-more-arms-trade-idUSBRE8550MO20120606>

10. <https://www.theatlantic.com/china/archive/2013/04/what-exactly-does-it-mean-that-the-us-is-pivoting-to-asia/274936/>
11. <https://www.acq.osd.mil/ic/DTTI.html>
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/why-india-really-likes-ashton-carter-11787>
15. <https://thediplomat.com/2018/01/trump-must-act-now-on-us-india-defense-relations/>
16. <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/why-india-really-likes-ashton-carter-11787?page=2>
17. <https://www.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/718872/carter-visit-underscores-robust-and-deepening-us-india-defense-relationship/>
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/why-india-really-likes-ashton-carter-11787?page=2>
21. <https://thediplomat.com/2018/01/trump-must-act-now-on-us-india-defense-relations/>
22. <https://www.rferl.org/a/pentagon-mattis-calls-russia-china-revisionist-powers/28985632.html>
23. <http://www.scmp.com/week-asia/opinion/article/2121474/us-japan-india-australia-quad-first-step-asian-nato>
24. <http://www.orfonline.org/research/indias-stance-on-dalai-lama-reveals-dynamics-with-china/>

