

## LEMOA, COMCASA, AND BECA IN INDIA'S FOREIGN CALCULUS

By  
**Muhammad Ali Baig**  
Research Associate

&  
**Alyan Waheed**  
Intern  
India Study Centre (ISC), ISSI

Edited by  
**Dr Arshad Ali**

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*(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)*



Image Source: Foreign Policy <sup>1</sup>

### ***Introduction***

Apparently, the cornerstone of Indo-American relations is defence and strategic cooperation. It is interesting to note that defence cooperation was the first area where the United States (U.S.) and India started engaging and the outcome of such a collaboration culminated at the Malabar Naval Exercise of 1992.<sup>2</sup> However, long before such a bilateral cooperation, in 1959, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, then the Senator from Massachusetts gave a speech in the Congress and stated that the “struggle between India and China for leadership of the East, for the respect of all Asia, for the opportunity to demonstrate whose way of life is the better.” He further stated that “it was in the interest of the West to assist India’s development and also the dangers posed to the world in an absence of such effort.”<sup>3</sup>

- <sup>1</sup> Anand Raghuraman and Justin Sherman, “The United States and India Need a Digital Handshake,” *Foreign Policy*, June 6, 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/06/06/india-us-technology-cooperation-digital-handshake/>.
- <sup>2</sup> Shveta Dhaliwal, ed., *Indo-US Relations: Steering through the Changing World Order* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2022), 14.
- <sup>3</sup> “Remarks of Senator John F. Kennedy, Conference on India and the United States, Washington, D.C., May 4, 1959,” *John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum*, May 4, 1959, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/archives/other-resources/john-f-kennedy-speeches/india-and-the-us-conference-washington-dc-19590504>; Dhaliwal, *Indo-US Relations: Steering through the Changing World Order*, 119.

Contemporarily, almost after six decades, the U.S. and India are steadily heading towards becoming strategic allies with the bilateral defence trade of around 18 billion USD. The U.S.-India relations can be categorized in two phases. The initial phase was somehow hostile, and the prominent example of such hostile relations is the Indo-Pakistan War of 1971, when the U.S. sent the seventh fleet of its naval forces containing a “75,000-ton aircraft carrier USS *Enterprise* along with UK’s HMS *Eagle*” to assist Pakistan against India. At that time, the then Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) also sent a “Flotilla armed with Nuclear missiles” to block the navies of the U.S. and the United Kingdom (U.K.), and hence together they could not help Pakistan.<sup>4</sup> The second phase started just after the end of the Cold War and the Malabar Naval Exercise (1992) was the beginning of a nascent defence cooperation between the U.S. and India.<sup>5</sup>

Since the dawn of the twenty-first century, India has become closer to the U.S. and such a new approach in Indian foreign policy has provided New Delhi with a number of benefits in multiple domains including political, diplomatic, economic, social, and most importantly the defence and military sectors. Today, New Delhi is the strategic ally of the U.S., and it has signed multiple defence agreements including the Indo-U.S. Nuclear Deal.<sup>6</sup> In addition to this, the U.S. assisted India in joining multilateral agreements on arms as well including the Wassenaar Arrangement on Export Controls for Conventional Arms and Dual-Use Goods and Technologies, Missile Technology control regime (MTCR), and the Australian Group.<sup>7</sup>

Besides the aforementioned multilateral agreements and conventions, the Washington D.C. and New Delhi also signed bilateral defence agreements including the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), Communications, Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), and the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA). In 2016, India was declared as the ‘Major Defence Partner’ to increase the sharing of technology and defence trade.<sup>8</sup>

### ***Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA)***

The LEMOA is another defence agreement between the U.S. and India to strengthen their mutual defence cooperation. The agreement provides armed forces of both countries the access to military

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<sup>4</sup> “Remarks of Senator John F. Kennedy, Conference on India and the United States, Washington, D.C., May 4, 1959”; Dhaliwal, *Indo-US Relations: Steering through the Changing World Order*, 119.

<sup>5</sup> Dhaliwal, *Indo-US Relations: Steering through the Changing World Order*, 14.

<sup>6</sup> Muhammad Ali Baig and Hamid Iqbal, “A Comparative Study of Blitzkrieg and Cold Start Doctrine: Lessons and Countermeasures for Pakistan,” *IPRI Journal* 18, no. 1 (Winter 2018): 30.

<sup>7</sup> “Boost for NSG Membership, India Joins Australia Group,” *The Economic Times*, January 19, 2018, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/boost-for-nsg-membership-india-joins-australia-group/articleshow/62568821.cms>.

<sup>8</sup> “A Timeline of U.S.-India Relations,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, 2022, <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-india-relations>.

facilities of each other for the purpose of replenishment and refuelling. It encompasses four major areas including the port calls, Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HA/DR), joint military exercises, and training.<sup>9</sup> It is significant for the naval forces of both countries as they cooperate closely in the Indo-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region (IOR). Under this agreement, India will have access to the military bases of the U.S. in Diego Garcia and Djibouti, which means that New Delhi will have more outreach in the IOR. Also, the Indian logistics capabilities in the IOR will be much enhanced.<sup>10</sup> The agreement is purely of logistics nature and is not a basing agreement. The U.S. has a Logistics Services Agreement (LSA) with more than 100 countries, and it demonstrates the growing defence cooperation between Washington and New Delhi. However, both maintain that they are compelled to cooperate due to the Chinese aggressive power and behaviour in the region.

### ***Communications, Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA)***

India is strategically important for the U.S. as Washington needs New Delhi to counter the growing influence of Beijing in the region. These defence agreements are mutually beneficial for the U.S. and India; however, for the latter these agreements have strategic significance. The COMCASA was signed in 2018 on the side-lines of the First 2+2 U.S.-Indo Security Dialogue. Since then, it has provided India with multiple strategic opportunities. Technologically arguing, the American data link is the most secure data communication platform in today's world, and it likely will provide India with considerable access to the U.S. intelligence database.<sup>11</sup> If such an assumption happens, it will provide actionable intelligence to Indian policymakers especially regarding the military deployments of Pakistan as well as China. Under this agreement, Washington will provide sensitive communication equipment and code to India which likely will give it access to real-time operational information.

Likewise, the military commanders and forward deployed assets from both states could communicate intelligence and information through secure channels with each other. Also, there will be little chances of communications jamming due to adversarial electronic warfare under the auspices of this agreement. In addition to these opportunities, India will get the armed version of MQ-9B *Sea Guardian* unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). The U.S. has already provided two MQ-9B reconnaissance UAVs to India. These drones are capable to be effective in cross-domain warfare and

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<sup>9</sup> "What Is LEMOA?," *The Hindu*, October 18, 2016, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/What-is-LEMOA/article15604647.ece>.

<sup>10</sup> Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan, "Logistics Pact with US: Why LEMOA Is Significant for India," *Observer Research Foundation*, August 31, 2016, <https://www.orfonline.org/research/logistics-pact-with-us-why-lemoa-is-significant-for-india/>.

<sup>11</sup> Dinakar Peri, "What Is COMCASA?," *The Hindu*, September 6, 2018, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/what-is-comcasa/article24881039.ece>.

are likely to enhance its capabilities in waging anti-submarine warfare, anti-surface warfare, search and rescue (SAR) operations.<sup>12</sup>

### ***Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA)***

The third most important defence agreement between Washington and New Delhi is BECA. It is an intelligence sharing agreement between the Indian Ministry of Defence and National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA) of the U.S. Department of Defence. It will enable both countries to share the classified satellite data, high-end military technology, and critical information. Now, New Delhi can access the U.S. Geo-Spatial Intelligence that will further increase the accuracy of automated drones and systems like UAVs and guided missiles.<sup>13</sup> It will also be able to access the advanced aeronautical and topographical data that will assist it in targeting and navigation. It will provide high-quality Global Positioning System (GPS) to India for navigating its missiles by using real-time intelligence to target the adversary with more accuracy.<sup>14</sup> In a nutshell, this agreement will improve the situational awareness of Indian military planners. These enhanced Indian capabilities are likely to create number of concerns for Pakistan, as India could plan and execute precision strikes in Pakistan. It is worthy to mention here that recently India has developed the Hypersonic Technology Demonstrator Vehicle (HTDV) which can carry hypersonic cruise missiles having speeds more than Mach-7.<sup>15</sup>

India can also use the information provided by the U.S. to conduct drone strikes in Pakistan. Also, the geosynchronous Space Based Infrared System Satellite (SBIRS Geo-5) can aid India in detecting any ballistic missile launched or deployed by Pakistan. Hence, Pakistan must speed up its Space Cooperation Outline, an agreement between China and Pakistan to launch communications and earth observation satellites.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> "What Is COMCASA? Security Agreement between India-US Signed during 2+2 Summit a Boost for Defence Preparedness," *Financial Express*, September 6, 2018, <https://www.financialexpress.com/defence/what-is-comcasa-security-agreement-between-india-us-signed-during-22-summit-a-boost-for-defence-preparedness/1304439/>.

<sup>13</sup> Shubhajit Roy, "Explained: BECA, and the Importance of 3 Foundational Pacts of India-US Defence Cooperation," *The Indian Express*, November 3, 2020, <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/becca-india-us-trade-agreements-rajnath-singh-mike-pompeo-6906637/>.

<sup>14</sup> S. M. Hali, "BECA — a New Indo-US Bilateral Agreement," *The News*, November 2, 2020, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/737917-beca-a-new-indo-us-bilateral-agreement>.

<sup>15</sup> Mahesh Ramaswamy and Asha Shivaswamy, "India's Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA): A Dysphoria in Disguise," *International Area Studies Review* 21, no. 3 (2018): 271–86, doi:10.1177/2233865918761922.

<sup>16</sup> Preethi Amaresh, "All Weather Friends: China and Pakistan Space Cooperation," *The Diplomat*, January 30, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/01/all-weather-friends-china-and-pakistan-space-cooperation/>.

### ***The Contemporary and Future Relevance of LEMOA, COMCASA, and BECA***

International Relations as a discipline, analyses the diplomatic-strategic relations of states, including bilateral as well as of multilateral nature. Due to this focus, the International Relations analysts give tremendous attention to the agreements, treaties, conventions, of bilateral and multilateral nature. History reveals that such instruments help states to “increase, improve and sometimes maintain their relative power position.”<sup>17</sup> For instance, a Realist scholar argued that international agreements and treaties such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), European Community (EC), and Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), are such instruments which garner maximum security and cooperation.<sup>18</sup>

In contemporary times, we can well assume that the U.S.-India bilateral agreements such as the LEMOA, COMCASA, and BECA, are such instruments which likely will increase, improve, and maintain India's relative power position. Hence, it is not ambitious to argue that these agreements are calculated moves by the Indian statecraft and are likely to benefit it in the Indian Ocean Region as well as the Indo-Pacific.

### ***Conclusions***

It can be concluded that the U.S.-India bilateral agreements like the LEMOA, COMCASA, and BECA are going to have a significant effect on Indian foreign policy. Furthermore, following the current trajectory of the U.S.-India defence cooperation, it can also be concluded that in the years to come, the bilateral relations of both nations will further strengthen and flourish. Apparently, both countries maintain somewhat similar policy rhetoric and strategic initiatives. For instance, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or Quad is poised to bring a new horizon of cooperation between the U.S. and India.<sup>19</sup> Understandably, such initiatives will further increase in the coming years as both have a common competitor to deal with. For the U.S. and India, the growing military capabilities of China are acting as a catalyst to increase the defence trade and sharing of modernized military equipment.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Muhammad Ali Baig and Syed Sabir Muhammad, “Trump's False ‘Realism,’” *International Bulletin of Political Psychology* 20, no. 1 (2020): 14.

<sup>18</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, “The False Promise of International Institutions,” *International Security* 19, no. 3 (Winter 1995): 5–49.

<sup>19</sup> “Quad Joint Leaders' Statement,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*, May 24, 2022, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page1e\\_000401.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page1e_000401.html).

<sup>20</sup> Koh Swee Lean Collin, “China-India Rivalry at Sea: Capability, Trends and Challenges,” *Asian Security* 15, no. 1 (2019): 5–24.

In retrospect, the signing of bilateral strategic agreements between the U.S. and India is likely to enhance the latter's capabilities and could help in mobilising its latent power. It is to no surprise that such capabilities could be used for countering the rising China. Nonetheless, this transformation in India's foreign policy could be temporary and a marriage of convenience, either for New Delhi or Washington.

Notably, the current events reveal that the Indian policymakers are cognizant of this fact and are reluctant in relinquishing their strategic autonomy and are exhibiting hedging in their foreign dealings. Most importantly, India has clearly refrained from condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine and despite the displeasure of the U.S., it has communicated its strategic necessities and is openly buying Russian oil. Likewise, the U.S. policymakers have given India a waiver by not sanctioning it under the auspices of CAATSA<sup>21</sup> for buying the Russian S-400 missile system.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, the Indian diplomats have conveyed their message well.

At the same time, it is worthy to note that India's trade with China has surpassed the 67 billion USD threshold in only six months of the year 2022, and the trajectory of such a bilateral trade is witnessing a 34.5 percent surge compared to last year.<sup>23</sup> Apparently, such an interdependence likely will discourage the rational Indian policy makers from adopting a hostile orientation vis-à-vis China.

In hindsight, the Indian foreign dealings with Russia and China likely could trigger a sense of disenchantment in the U.S. foreign policy making circles. It is to be remembered here that President Biden's *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance 2021* noted words such as "growing rivalry" and "competition" when mentioning Russia and China. It also noted that "We will support China's neighbors and commercial partners in defending their rights to make independent political choices free of coercion or undue foreign influence." However, the Indian policy makers prefer not to use such rhetoric neither in relation to Russia nor China, thus preserving and demonstrating their strategic autonomy.

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<sup>21</sup> CAATSA stands for Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act.

<sup>22</sup> "No CAATSA Sanctions On India - After Historic Nuclear Deal, US 'Approves' CAATSA Waiver For India," *The Eurasian Times*, July 15, 2022, <https://eurasianimes.com/no-caatsa-sanctions-us-approves-caatsa-waiver-to-india/>.

<sup>23</sup> "India-China Trade Goes up to over USD 67 Billion in First Half of the Year amid Surge in Chinese Exports," *The Economic Times*, July 14, 2022, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/foreign-trade/india-china-trade-goes-up-to-over-usd-67-billion-in-first-half-of-the-year-amid-surge-in-chinese-exports/articleshow/92860223.cms>.

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