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**Enhanced threats**

In the face of continuous arms build-up by India and attaining nuclear capability, Pakistan had no choice but to develop the capability for an appropriate response to it in conventional warfare as well as coming up with a nuclear deterrent to ward-off lurking dangers to its security. This has so far helped prevent another full-scale war between the two countries and maintain an uneasy peace in the region.

However, the US-India nexus as strategic partners, ostensibly designed to ‘contain China’, has exponentially aggravated the security situation in the region and has particularly precipitated the external security threat to Pakistan. Recently signed four defence deals between the US and India – referred to as Foundation Defence Agreements – have created an alarming situation for Pakistan. Under the latest of the four agreements titled Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement 2020, both countries will share geospatial precision information. It will help India in precision targeting its weapons and missiles. The agreement specifically mentions sharing satellite information, telephone intercepts.

The General Security of Military Information Agreement relates to security of information between collaborating defence companies of India and the US. The Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement was signed between India and the US in August 2016 allows the military of each country to replenish from the other's bases: access supplies, spare parts and services from the other country's land facilities, air bases, and ports, which can then be reimbursed. It is particularly useful in the sea where the Indian fleet can use the US’s support bases for replenishment.

The Communication Compatibility and Security Agreement relates to communicating with each other in total secrecy about mutual enemies. It will allow India to effectively integrate the USA Eye in the Sky with other targeting platforms like drones, fighters and boats in total secrecy. The signing of these deals has facilitated the purchase of Globe Master III C-17, Chinook troop career, M-777 ultra-light Howitzers for high altitudes, Apache GunShips AH64E (Anti-Tank), Fire Finding radars, P-8i Poseidon anti-submarine planes, Predator Reconnaissance drones and Integrated Air Defense Weapon Systems by India. India has recently also inducted French Rafale Planes in its Air Force.

Though these agreements and supply of weapons to India apparently are designed to block China in the Indian Ocean and restrict its maneuvering space out of its territory up north but they also make Pakistan increasingly vulnerable to the Indian threat to its territorial integrity and security. US support for permanent Indian membership of the UNSC and role in decision-making in the World Bank, IMF and inclusion in the NSG without signing the NPT are also ominous developments in regards to peace and security in the region. The US and India both are also all out to sabotage CPEC.

The situation calls for both China and Pakistan to upgrade their cooperation in the defence and economic domains and collectively play a role in neutralizing the security threat posed by the US-India nexus to them as well as the region.

It is satisfying to note that both China and Pakistan are fully cognizant of the permeating threat to security in the region and understand the significance of enhanced cooperation between them in that regard. Prime Minister Imran Khan echoed this realization when talking to Chinese State Councillor and Minister of Defence General Wei Fenghe. General Wei too reiterated that the South Asia and Arabian Sea region needs peace, stability and economic development. The Chinese general also met Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff General Nadeem Raza and COAS General Qamar Javed Bajwa and discussed matters pertaining to regional security and enhancement in defence cooperation between the two countries. A memorandum was also signed for enhancement of defence cooperation between both the armies.

Pakistan and China already have very strong defence ties. The Aeronautical Complex at Kamra and joint production of JF-17 Thunder aircraft are monumental symbols of defence cooperation between the two countries. It is pertinent to point out that in early March 2017 a Chinese-built Low to Medium altitude Air Defence System was inducted into the air defence system of the Pakistan Army. This will considerably enhance its response capability to the current and emerging threats.

China is also building four Type-054A Missile Frigates for the Pakistan Navy, one of which was inducted into its arsenal on August 23, 2020. Fitted with the latest surface, subsurface, anti-air weapons, combat management system and sensors it will be one of the technologically advanced surface platforms of Pakistan Navy Fleet, and will significantly contribute in maintaining peace, stability and security in the Indian Ocean region.

China fully understands the challenges being faced by Pakistan, its geo-political relevance, contributions towards regional peace and stability and has repeatedly assured full spectrum support for Pakistan in grappling with those challenges. It has always appreciated Pakistan’s efforts to deal with terrorism and has urged the world to acknowledge those achievements as well.

CPEC is not only an economically transformational undertaking for Pakistan, China and the region but also the best alternative route for the latter in case of the likely sea blockade by India and the US as a ploy to restrict Chinese access to the Indian Ocean and beyond. It thus has a strategic value from a defence point of view as well. CPEC makes Pakistan and China eternal partners in maintaining peace and security in the region and stimulating shared economic prosperity.

In view of the increased security threat and the asymmetry in conventional warfare made possible by the induction of US supplied weapons and defence agreements between the US and India, Pakistan will have to go for restoring parity with India in that domain. The situation underlines the inevitability of enhanced defence cooperation with China as well as boosting the indigenous production of technologically advanced defence equipment. Fixing the economy and forging impregnable national unity would be added advantages in this regard.

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