**US-India strategic congruence**

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The global geopolitical alignments are achanging. The world is inexorably moving towards a multipolar dispensation. The US is withdrawing from mainland Asia and is largely restricted to its peripheries only—the Arabian Peninsula in the West and the Indo-Pacific Region (IPR) in the East. China is fast emerging as a behemoth to challenge the US’ mantle as the uncontested global super power. The US needed a strategic ally/partner on mainland Asia to contain China’s meteoric and multidimensional rise. India was chosen for this singular albeit dubious honour. It has been seduced and is being armed and readied for this onerous task.

Despite the fact that India is a mere strategic partner of the US and not an ally yet, the US has signed four foundational agreements with it. They define the current US-Indo strategic alignment and herald a formal defence arrangement in the future.

The General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSMIA), was signed in 2002. It sought to lay the foundation for sustained US-Indo defence relations-strategic partnership. It proposed to protect all classified information/technology that they shared. Further, it aimed at promoting interoperability and formed the basis for future US arms sales to India.

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The Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement, (LEMOA) was signed in September 2016. This basically established an accounting mechanism which allows both countries broad based replenishments from each other’s designated military facilities. The Indian Peninsula juts into the Indian Ocean dominating all East-West trade and other naval movements in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). Furthermore, the Nicobar and Andaman Islands provide excellent oversight and access to the Malacca Straits—the strategically vital chokepoint on the international sea lines of communications. Thus, both provide tremendous strategic and logistics advantages to military forces foraying forth from them into the IPR.

The Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) was signed in September 2018. It was essentially a follow up of the GSMIA. COMCASA ensures secure, encrypted military communication and improves interoperability with all other US allies, including QUAD. Data acquired through the COMCASA cannot be divulged by the US without Indian consent. How will India achieve interoperability/synergy with the US when the bulk of its military equipment is of Soviet-Russian origin, remains unsaid? What interoperability implies is critical—not in how the Indians perceive it but how the US ordains it. That will determine the future of joint operations by the two militaries/QUAD and the status of India’s famed strategic autonomy.

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The Basic Exchange and Coordination Agreement (BECA) was signed in October 2020 between the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency of the US Department of Defence and India’s Ministry of Defence. It allows both countries to share all kinds of military information, aero-space, geo-magnetic and gravity data, maps, nautical and aeronautical charts, commercial and other unclassified imagery, etc. Classified information like sensitive satellite and sensor data can also be shared with proper safeguards. Collaboration in the cyber, space and electro-magnetic spectrums is apparently pending.

Provision of real time targeting and navigation data from the US systems will enhance the accuracy of Indian missiles, PGMs, armed drones and even facilitate aircraft navigation.

However, will US technology mesh with Soviet-Russian military platforms (SU 30 MKI, MIG 29s), or even indigenous Indian systems, seamlessly? For example, will US supplied targeting and navigational data enhance the accuracy and effectiveness of a BRAHMOS missile or the S 400 ABM system? The IAF fiasco at Balakot saw Indian pilots fly French aircraft to launch Israeli PGMs; they hit nothing in the end. Will multiple independent systems operate within the Indian military in parallel, simultaneously—US, Russian, Israeli, British, French and indigenous platforms with their own technologies and compatible data? Will synergetic, cohesive, mutually supporting military forces emerge from this maze of confusing and perhaps conflicting technologies and data? Resultantly, operational strategies will be disjointed, difficult to execute and self-defeating!

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However, the US is slowly and steadily tightening its grip on India. Through the foundational agreements, the US has progressively marshalled it to its ranks. Adroit diplomacy, the skilful exploitation of India’s hubris and megalomania, its regional ambitions, the lure of modern weapon systems, technologies, the assured provision of critical data and the promise of recognition at the global level have helped consummate the coup. India is now firmly on the US bandwagon, senselessly willing to take on China, be it in the Himalayas, in the IPR or both.

Although India must have carried out a detailed assessment of its strategic partnership with the US yet it does not seem to have made any realistic deductions from it. Remarkably, except for the LEMOA, all agreements are a one-way transaction from the US to India. This gives the US controlling leverage over it. Furthermore, by synchronising its systems with those of the US, India will inevitably give it crucial ingress into its decision-making loop. By controlling and manipulating the flow of crucial data, imagery, satellite and sensor information the US will exercise a near veto on India’s options at the operational strategy level.

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The US will have enhanced India’s military capability substantially however, it will need to exercise some sort of control on Indian intents as well. That might include specifics like where and against whom which weapon systems supplied by it can be used. Will they be only China specific or may be used against other South Asian states like Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal etc, too? Either way, its implications are colossal.

Slowly and gradually the US’ hold will start impacting India’s freedom of thought and action as well. The more that India gets embroiled with the US the lesser will be its independent options. The US will manoeuvre it into a strategic cul de sac where it will either have to follow US diktat or lose all modern technologies, weapon systems and critical data that it is getting through the four foundational agreements and otherwise—perils of an uneven, unequal strategic partnership.

Indo-US strategic convergence is already polarising the IPR and the South-Central Asian Region. It is impacting China, Pakistan and the Sino-Pak relationship massively.