

Indo-US Defence Cooperation: Strategic Convergence of the Millennium

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Bilateral relations between India and United States have become multifaceted by now. Defence and security ties have become the significant pillar of the bilateral relations. Defence relationship between the two countries increasingly became a major pillar of Indo-US strategic partnership with the signing of “New Framework for India-US Defence Relations” in 2005. The signing of the treaty resulted in intensification in defence trade, joint exercises, personal exchanges, collaboration and cooperation in maritime security and counter-piracy, and exchanges between each of the three services of Indian defence. The ‘Defence Framework Agreement’ was updated and renewed for another 10 years in June 2015.¹ Later, in February 2020 when Trump visited India the ‘Strategic Partnership’ level of bilateral Indo-US relations were elevated to ‘Comprehensive Global Partnership’ level. The author in this paper has discussed the defence cooperation between India and United States in two parts: First part deals with the Defence purchases; and second part deals with joint exercises. Defence cooperation commenced between the two countries since the commencement of the Golden Era of Indo-US relations during the George W. Bush’s (Jr.) regime. Though, the Bush regime mainly focused on sale of Nuclear Reactors to India, his successors got more interested towards cultivating India as an excellent market for its conventional weapons. This is obvious from the date-wise List in the Table at the end of this section where the purchases have been mentioned since 2008.

Section-I

Diversifying India’s Arms Profile in 21st Century

According, to Ellen M Lord, Under Secretary of Defence, an official and an analyst, Indo-US Defence Deal which was zero in the year 2008 has crossed a mark of US \$18 billion within a span of one decade in 2018.²

A list of Arms Purchased by India since 2008 has been provided at the end of the Article, which has been compiled from the website of Defence Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) of US. The list reveals that with the last deal struck during the visit of Donald Trump to India the total cost has crossed \$21 billion mark. Barack Obama designated India as “Major Defence Partner” (MDP) in 2016, which was a bespoke status to India that would facilitate India’s access to US advance equipment and technology which are available only to NATO allies of US.

United States under Donald Trump has followed a foreign policy to woo India which in many ways is being considered as a continuation of the foreign policy pursued by his predecessors Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama. Both leaders aspired to move closer to India strategically, and succeeded measurably in areas like arms sales. It is evident from the statement made by Trump, during Modi-Trump meeting on the side-lines of ASEAN meeting in November 2017 that the two leaders have resolved that “two of the world’s greatest democracies should also have the world’s greatest militaries”.³ India subsequently has grown to be single largest importer of defence equipment in the world, and a major purchaser of US equipment. India has purchased a range of platform, including lightweight howitzers, Harpoon missiles, surveillance and anti-submarine warfare aircraft, transport aircraft, and special operations aircraft from US.⁴ Thus, like his predecessors Trump too have been courting India for both economic and strategic reasons in the Pacific waters.

Indo-US Defence Deals:

Ever since India and United States signed the ‘Defence Framework Agreement’ in 2005 they have moved towards cooperation in the field of defence. The Framework envisaged both defence cooperation and enhancement of security of each other. The cooperation basically has been in two areas: first, sale and purchase of arms and ammunition along with other equipment and logistics; second security enhancement through joint military exercises in bilateral and multilateral format. This section focuses on the first part only i.e. sale and purchase of weapons between India and US; and the second section deals with the Indo-US military exercises. US has been increasingly growing as major supplier of defence equipment to India, along with promise of technology transfer and other related services. According to SIPRI (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) exports of American weapons to India from 2013 to 2017 increased 557 percent over the previous five-year period. American arms sales to India as of now in

2020 stands around \$18 billion, and could climb further.⁵ However, this figure comes to over \$21 billion as provided in the details in the Table provided at the end. Even by conservative estimates the defence deal so far in the new millennium or ever since India decided to diversify its arms procurement the Indo-US defence purchase stands above US \$21 billion.

Major US Platforms for India:

India-US signed an agreement on September 28, 2015 with an estimated worth around \$3 billion. The delivery of the items was delayed owing to ongoing negotiations between US and India over offset obligations. Offsets obligations require that the seller must invest a portion of the contract price in India.⁶ Such clauses are often made part of the defence deals as it involves a huge amount. The agreement included 15 CH-47F(I) Chinook Helicopters and 22 AH-64E Apache Helicopters for the Indian Air Force. The first batch of four Chinook helicopters, manufactured by Boeing arrived in February 2020 and were inducted in Indian Air Force at Gujarat's Mundra port on the western coast of India.⁷ According to newspaper reports, 17 of the 22 Apache helicopters have also arrived in February 2020.⁸ CH-47F(I) is an advanced multi-mission helicopter, which was scheduled to provide the Indian armed forces with unmatched strategic airlift capability across the full spectrum of combat and humanitarian missions.⁹ The Apache attack helicopters are one of the very sophisticated weapon systems of US. These are equipped with the hellfire missiles, night vision capabilities, 70 mm rockets and an automatic gun, which makes it the most lethal machine in the world. Thus, Apache would add greater firepower and agility to the Indian ground forces for any quick and intense operations against Pakistan.¹⁰

Some of the other key foreign military sales notified to Congress include MH-60R Seahawk helicopters, Apache helicopters, P-8I maritime patrol aircraft, and M777 howitzers. India became the first non-NATO partner of US to be offered Missile Technology Control Regime Category-1 Unmanned Aerial System—the Sea Guardian UAS manufactured by General Atomics.¹¹ According, to reports, the US has sold to India over USD 6.6 billion in defence articles via the direct commercial sales process, which licenses the export of the defence equipment, services, and related manufacturing technologies controlled under the 21 categories of the US Munitions List (USML). The top categories of DCS to India include aircraft, electronics and turbine engines.¹²

India also agreed to purchase some of the most sophisticated US platforms during President Donald Trump's visit February 25-26, 2020. The defence deal was \$3 billion worth of state-of-the-art defence equipment including six Boeing AH-64E Apache Guardian attack helicopters for the Indian Army (\$800 million) and 24 Sikorsky MH-60 RomeoSea Hawk multi-role helicopters for the Indian Navy(\$2.6 billion)¹³. The deal comes in the wake of earlier purchases worth \$18 billion between 2008 and 2019 as stated in the Table below. These platforms are sure to enhance India's combat capabilities acquired at a time when vigorous parallel efforts are being made in India to promote jointness in military affairs through the newly created post of Chief of Defence Staff.¹⁴

Table-I: Arms Purchased by India from US since 2008

| SN | Date | Armaments Purchased | Cost (US Dollar) |
|----|--------------------|--|------------------|
| 1 | September 9, 2008 | 20 AGM-84L Harpoon block II Missiles as well as associated equipment and services | \$170 million |
| 2 | September 30, 2008 | 510 CBU-105 Sensor Fuzed Weapons as well as associated equipment and services | \$375 million |
| 3 | December 28, 2009 | 12 C-130J-30 Aircraft with complete package | \$119 billion |
| 4 | January 26, 2010 | 145 M777 155mm Light-Weight Towed Howitzers with Laser Inertial Artillery Pointing Systems (LINAPS) and associated parts, equipment, training and logistical support | \$647 million |
| 5 | April 26, 2010 | 10 Boeing C-17 Globemaster III Aircraft and associated equipment, parts and logistical support | \$5.8 billion |
| 6 | December 21, 2010 | 21 AGM-84L Harpoon Block II Missiles and associated equipment, parts and logistic support | \$200 million |
| 7 | December 27, 2010 | 22 AH-64D Block III Apache helicopters with various engines, equipment, weapons, training, parts and logistical support | \$1.4 billion |
| 8 | June 27, 2011 | 32 MK-54 All-Up-Round Lightweight Torpedoes and associated Equipment, parts, training and logistical support | \$86 million |

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| SN | Date | Armaments Purchased | Cost (US Dollar) |
|----|------------------|--|------------------|
| 9 | October 27, 2011 | (6) Lockheed Martin C-130Js and associated equipment, parts, training and logistical support | \$1.2 billion |
| 10 | August 7, 2013 | 145 M777 155mm Light-Weight Towed Howitzers and associated equipment, parts, training and logistical support | \$885 million |
| 11 | July 01, 2014 | 12 UGM-84 Harpoon Block II Encapsulated Missiles, 10UTM-84L Harpoon Encapsulated Training missiles, 2 Encapsulated Harpoon certifications training vehicles, containers, spare and repair parts and test equipment. | \$200 million |
| 12 | April 24, 2015 | Follow-on Support of C-130J Super Hercules Aircraft and associated equipment, parts and logistical support. | \$96 million |
| 13 | May 11, 2017 | CBRN Support equipment. It included 38,034 general purpose masks; Joint Service Lightweight Integrated Suit Technology (JSLIST), which consists of 38,034 each: suits, pairs of trousers, pairs of gloves, pairs of boots and NBC bags, 854 aprons, 854 alternative aprons, 9,509 Quick Doff Hoods, and 114,102 M61 filters. | \$75 million |
| 14 | June 26, 2017 | (1)C-17 Transport Aircraft with (4) Turbofan F-117-PW-100 Engines The deal also included several other logistics. | \$366.2 million |
| 15 | June 12, 2018 | (6) AH-64E Apache Helicopters | \$930 million |
| 16 | February 6, 2019 | (2) 777 Large Aircraft Infrared Countermeasures (LAIRCM) Self-Protection Suits (SPS). The deal also included other relevant logistics. | \$190 million |
| 17 | April 2, 2019 | (24) MH-60R Multi-mission helicopters. The deal also included number of avionics, equipment and logistics. | \$2.6 billion |
| 18 | July 26, 2019 | C-17 sustainment follow-on support. The deal also included other repair and spare parts, personnel training | \$670 million |

| SN | Date | Armaments Purchased | Cost (US Dollar) |
|--|--|---|---------------------|
| | | and equipment training, publications and technical data transportation, US Government and contractor technical assistance and other related logistics support | |
| 19 | November 19, 2019 | (13) MK45 5 inch/62 caliber (MOD4) naval guns and related equipment. (3500) D349 Projectile, 5/54 MK 92 MOD 1Ammunition.The deal also included other ammunition, spare parts, personnel training and equipment training, publications and technical data transportation, US Government and contractor technical assistance and other related logistics support. | 1.0210 Billion |
| 20 | February 7, 2020 | An Integrated Air Defence Weapon System (IADWS) with associated equipment and services | \$1.867 billion |
| Total Arms Purchase till Date February 07, 2020 | | | 18.8 Billion |
| 21 | February 25, 2020 (During Visit of President Donald Trump to India, the deal has been signed) | 6 AH-64E Apache (\$800 million) and 24 MH-60 Romeo helicopters (\$2.6 billion six AH-64E Apache (\$800 million) and 24 MH-60 Romeo helicopters (\$2.6 billion) with other relevant accessories, equipment, and ammunition and parts. | 3 billion |
| Grand Total | | | 21.8 billion |

Source: Defence Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA), State Department, www.dsca.mil
(Compiled from the several reports that are published by DSCA on its websites from time to time. Only the last entry has been included from newspaper reports)

Factors for Growing Indo-US Defence Ties:

Firstly, India traditionally was overly dependent upon Soviet Union and later Russia for its Defence arsenals and equipment in all the wings of Indian armed forces. However, in the aftermath of Cold War it has been diversifying its defence purchases, and in that process has gone for frantic buying from US, along with from other countries. India is mainly aiming for sophisticated weapons to modernise its defence and arsenals.

Secondly, India has made considerable economic progress since the world entered into an era of globalization. Now India is having funds

in the form of foreign exchange to buy defence hardware from the open market. It is in line with this aspiration that India has been obliging US, through multi-billion defence orders.

Thirdly, the rise of an aggressive and expansionist China in the Indo-Pacific, has made the strategic convergence between India and US an imperative amidst regional security and strategic concerns. It was the rising geopolitical tensions in the South China Sea; the growing hegemony of China in the Pacific; and its systematic intrusion into the Indian Ocean which made it imperative for Obama to devise "Pivot to Asia" foreign policy and Trump to continue to focus on China's sinister design in Indo-Pacific. Therefore, US was on the lookout for a regional partner who could be viable bet against China. India became the obvious choice given its stature and defence capability. This facilitated India's access to some of the sophisticated weapons of US, which are otherwise available only to its NATO allies.

Fourthly, given the US-Russia rivalry for hegemony in different parts of the world, US never leaves any opportunity to curtail growth and expansion of Russia. Thus, US given its relations with Russia, wants India to sever its defence ties completely with Russia, yet owing to a huge market, that India is, US has not been too emphatic about it. India too is not interested to put its all eggs in the same basket, given the globalization of world defence market. Accordingly, India has been shopping arms and ammunition for its defence from the global market and thus ensures that it gets the best deal.

Fifthly, Indo-US defence deals have tremendous potentials to transform the geo-strategic environment of South Asia. US is a major power of the world and hence is supporting India to play a larger role of the regional policeman and fulfil its long-term hegemonic designs to dominate smaller states with the help of its military strength. Hence the defence cooperation has accelerated India's dream of becoming the global power.¹⁵ It is in accordance with such aspirations that US is willing to cooperate with India and India is willing to get nearer to US.

Sixthly, India-US defence partnership is likely to benefit from the Strategic Trade Authorisation-1 (STA-1) status accorded to defence exports to India. However, more fundamentally, the advantages that would accrue are by the Industrial Security Annex (ISA) signed in December 2019 during the 2+2 Dialogue.¹⁶ The framework of the dialogue has been quite beneficial as a channel for negotiation and finalization of deals at the highest level. This has further smoothed the defence cooperation between the two countries.

Pitfalls and Implications:

The 2016 designation of MDP (Major Defence Partner)¹⁷ to India by Obama, though sounds like a unique one for a Non-NATO ally like India. US resorts to such rhetoric when it comes to grab arms sale orders and the same has hardly any long-term implications. It may have heightened expectations around the direction and ambition of the bilateral relationship, but the fact remains it did not mean much to US as it was in great need to sale its arms to survive the ongoing economic recession within. US sales arms to many countries of the world, and may be over the same period of time may have sold much more than to other countries than to what is has sold to India. Yet once again in November 2017, Trump resorted to another rhetoric that the two of the world's greatest democracies should also have the world's greatest militaries. Thus, there continues the lack of clarity around such statements and that generates lingering uncertainty, misalign expectations, and often leaves both sides disappointed.

The Way Ahead:

Trump has given a further push to arms sales of America. As reported, the State Department of US has been advocating for the Lockheed Martin F-21 and Boeing F/A-18 Two state-of-the-art fighter aircraft that is being evaluated by India. These US platforms provide critical opportunities to enhance India's military capabilities and protect shared security interests in the Indo-Pacific region. Given China's consistent rise as an economic power and its hegemony in the Indo-Pacific, Indo-US strategic convergence becomes an imperative, which shall continue to energise defence cooperation with consequent defence procurement and joint exercises. The next section of the article deliberates about the joint military exercises as part of defence cooperation between India and United States.

Section-II

Indo-US Defence Cooperation: Joint Military Exercises

The bilateral relations between the two world's largest democracies have entered into a new era of strategic partnership between them in which the joint military exercises in bilateral and multilateral format has been a great contributory factor toward strengthening defence cooperation and addressing their security and strategic concerns in

accordance with their regional and global concerns. USA and India signed an agreement in September 2018 to pave the way for India to buy advanced American weaponry and to share sensitive military technology, strengthening their military partnership as both powers warily eye the rise of China as a world power, economically and militarily.¹⁸ The agreement is known as “Communication Compatibility and Security Agreement”. It also facilitates the transfer of high-tech communications platforms to India. Both countries so far have communicated over open radio channels.

Major bilateral military exercises are Cope-India (Air Force), *YudhAbhyas* (Army) and *Vajra Prahar* (Special Forces). Apart from these exercises in bilateral format, Indian forces have also been exercising with US forces in exercises which are organized by US or others in multilateral format like: Red Flag, Blue Flag, Pitch Black and Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC), and Malabar exercise covering the broad expanse of the Indo-Pacific. Bilateral Military Exercises and defence exchanges are an important aspect of deepening bilateral defence cooperation between India and the United States. Some of the major bilateral exercises are being discussed below.

Yudh Abhyas:

The US-India military drill is an annual peacekeeping practice and is one of the largest running joint military training and defence cooperation endeavours between India and the US. This is the 15th edition of the joint exercise which was held in September 2019. The exercise is hosted alternately by each of the two countries. 2019 *Yudh Abhyas* was held at Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Washington State. The practice that followed the 15th cycle of a separate training mission involved close to 700 troops.¹⁹ The exercise provides an opportunity to the armed forces of both countries to train in an integrated manner at Battalion level with joint planning at Brigade level. During the exercise multiple scenarios are rehearsed with a view to understand each other’s organizational structure and battle procedures which would result in a higher degree of ‘jointmanship’ that would further facilitate interoperability between the armed forces of the two nations to meet any unforeseen contingency across the globe. The armed forces of both countries jointly train, plan and execute a series of well-developed operations for neutralization of threats of varied nature.²⁰

Vajra Prahar Exercise:

'Vajra Prahar' is a Special Forces²¹ joint training exercise conducted alternately in India and the US. The 10th edition of the exercise was held at Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM) in Seattle during October 13-28, 2019. This exercise is designed to enable sharing of best practices and experience in areas such as joint mission planning capabilities and operational tactics.²²

Tiger Triumph:

The year 2019 three joint military exercises took place between India and US: (i) Vajra Prahar; (ii) YudhAbhyas; (iii) Tiger Triumph.

Tiger Triumph was a nine-day humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) exercise aimed at developing inter-operability between the militaries of the two countries in HADR operations. Key assets of Army, Navy and Air Force were deployed for the exercise.²³ The exercise brought together 500 American Marines and sailors, and about 1,200 soldiers, sailors and air force personnel to train side-by-side. The official stated objective of the exercise was to prepare for rescue operation and disaster response. However, the exercise also included search-and-seizure training and liver-fire drills.²⁴ Thus far, USSR is the only country with which India has conducted similar exercises involving three branches of its armed forces, during the Cold War, India was much closer to Soviet Union than to the USA, during the later phase of the cold war. Consequently, most of the arsenals of India are still made-up of Soviet military hardware, even though India has been diversifying its arms purchases in the new millennium.

Cope India Exercises:

These are series of exercises between Indian Air Force and United States Air Force. It is conducted on and over Indian soil. First Cope India Exercise was conducted at Gwalior in February 2004 with the US Air Force. The exercise included flight tests, practice and demonstrations as well as lectures on subjects related to aviation. Since then the exercise has been repeated in 2005, 2006 and 2018.

Malabar Naval Exercise:

It is a trilateral naval exercise involving India, the United States and Japan. Alongside these three permanent partners there are also non-

permanent partners like Australia and Singapore. The exercise begun in 1992 as a naval bilateral exercise between India and USA. It was suspended from 1998 to 2002 as a result of India's nuclear weapons tests in 1998. Otherwise, the exercise has been held every year. Japan joined later as a permanent member in 2015. This is an annual exercise that includes diverse activities like fighter combat operations from aircraft carriers; and Maritime Interdiction Operations. The 23rd edition of the Malabar Exercise was held in 2019. The objective was to further strengthen naval ties between the three countries. The exercise aims to enhance cooperation and inter-operability, based on shared values and principles, between the three Navies. Complex maritime operations in the surface, sub-surface firings, maritime interdiction operations are conducted during the sea-phase of the exercise.²⁵ This exercise now is understood by many experts on maritime issues that it is to keep a consistent pressure on China in the Indian Ocean in particular, and Asia-Pacific in general.

The Implications for US and India:

Joint Military Exercises are conducted not only to enhance interoperability of forces or to train them. These exercises also have many strategic implications and geopolitical imaginations. Off late, the United States' major concern is regarding India's willingness to openly counter China as the Chinese expand their influence in the waters between Indian and Pacific Oceans. China's growing hegemony in the Indian Ocean, Pacific Ocean and South China Sea in particular has serious geo-political implications in the maritime arena. US has no choice but to contain China in these regions and thus articulated foreign policy choice of "Pivot to Asia". Alongside other methods and means, joint military exercises are also to send clear signals to the adversaries. Most of the above-mentioned exercises are oriented towards addressing such strategic and security concerns of India and the United States.

Even though India is worried about China's growing influence in the region; yet India is also critical of the American's new "Indo-Pacific" strategy, which aims to curb the growing influence of China's navy in the region by elevating India as a cornerstone of future military cooperation. India prefers to avert confrontation with China when it can. Therefore, India's reluctance may stymie US plans for India to be a linchpin of its efforts to counter China. The fact of the situation is that China's presence is growing in India's traditional sphere of influence, which is alarming for India. China's strategy is that it has struck seaport deals with countries encircling India. Therefore, the worry could be

that China may turn these seaports, which are currently being used for commercial purposes, into calling docks for Chinese navy by leveraging the enormous debt of countries as it has lent money massively across the region. Military exercises are again to counter such sinister designs of a rival power in air, on land and in the maritime region.

Conclusion:

Indo-US bonhomie that began in the new millennium has placed too many bets on India. Fact remains that India historically represented a regional challenge in its own right. However, it has quickly been becoming a key player in the larger American strategy in Asia. US administration believes that India is a partner that is willing and able to play a larger role, towards fulfilment of US strategic aspirations in Indo-Pacific region as well as global region.

On the other hand, US economy has been in great troubles since 2008. It had to face the severe sub-prime crisis. Its investment bankers collapsed and security marketed melted beyond repair. China surpassed it in many areas of economic and became one of the largest beneficiaries of globalization. Thus, US has been in great need of market for its arms, oil and other goods.

Therefore, both the imperatives of US economy and changing geopolitical environment in the Indo-Pacific necessitated Indo-US convergence. The convergence was strategic both economically and militarily. It is in this context that the defence cooperation between India and United States has been growing ever since it took off. Indo-US relations has seen many ups and downs. It has journeyed from estrangement to engagement. During the post-9/11 phase it has seen a level of engagement in almost all walks of a nation's life that it won't be an exaggeration to designate it as 'strategic convergence of the millennium'.

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are specially organized, trained and equipped. They support special operations. Special operations are law enforcement, military and intelligence operations that are carried out using unconventional methods and sources. The primary goal of these operations is to achieve a political or military objective where a conventional force might affect the overall outcome. The US relied on special operation between 2003 and 2012 for its national security. The purpose of the special operations was to identify, hunt and kill terrorists. Examples are: Operation Blue Star, Operation Pawan, Operation Cactus, and Kargil War.

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