

India and US to further expand military-strategic ties

By Deepal Jayasekera
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India and the United States decided to further expand their already close military-strategic ties during a visit to New Delhi last week by US Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel.

During his three-day visit, Hagel held talks with the leading personnel in India's new Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj, National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, and Arun Jaitley, who doubles as finance and defense minister.

Hagel and Jaitley agreed to begin talks on renewing the ten-year US-India Defense Framework Agreement. Negotiated in 2005 and due to expire next July, the Defense Framework Agreement marked a fundamental shift in Indo-US relations, with India—which the US had viewed as an adversary for much of the Cold War—emerging as one of the Pentagon's most sought-after partners.

Hagel and Jaitley also decided to move forward with implementation of the Defense Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI). Under this 2012 agreement, the US has offered to partner with India in the production of some high-technology weapons and weapons-systems with the stated aim of fostering an Indo-US “global strategic partnership.”

Speaking last Saturday at an event organized by the Observer Research Foundation, Hagel proclaimed the DTTI “the centerpiece of our defense relationship.” He went on to claim that the military co-development and co-production deals Washington is offering New Delhi are unlike those the US has with “any other country.”

The US has reportedly offered to work with India in jointly developing seven military technologies, and, according to Hagel, has placed “over a dozen concrete proposals” on the table.

According to news reports, Washington's proposals include manufacture of the US Javelin anti-tank missile in

India and co-development of the next-generation of Javelin missile, co-production of the Hawk 21 surface-to-air missile, and collaboration on developing magnetic catapults, which help larger planes take off from smaller ships.

The US, which has sold India \$10 billion worth of arms over the last decade, is eager to expand military sales to India—currently the world's largest arms importer.

But the prominence the US is giving to the DTTI underscores that strategic questions are uppermost in the minds of Obama administration and Pentagon officials.

The US has been aggressively courting India for more than a decade with the aim of building it up as a strategic counterweight to China and making New Delhi a pivotal link in its drive to isolate and strategically encircle China.

By offering India co-production deals for advanced weapons systems, the US is seeking to promote closer integration of the US and Indian militaries as part of a broader thrust of military-strategic, economic and diplomatic initiatives aimed at harnessing India to Washington's predatory strategic agenda.

Hagel himself made reference to this agenda during his India visit, while seeking to obscure its aggressive and provocative character.

The US defense secretary crowed that “today as India looks East and the U.S. rebalances” towards Asia—i.e., shifts the preponderance of its military power to the Indo-Pacific region—the two countries “are aligning more closely than ever.”

Later, however, he brazenly claimed that the US's push for closer military-strategic ties with India is not directed against China. India, claimed Hagel, need not choose “between closer partnership with America and improved ties with China,” just as the US “need not choose between its Asian alliances and a constructive relationship with China.”

US imperialism's strategic focus on India has been

driven by its concerns about a rising China. However, the rapid escalation of Washington's conflicts with Russia has added a new dimension, especially to the US push for arms sales and co-production agreements with India.

US successes on this front would largely come at Russia's expense, since Russia has long been India's most important arms supplier and this military partnership has, at least since the end of the Cold War, formed the bedrock of close ties between Moscow and New Delhi.

While Hagel made no public call for India to distance itself from Moscow, he did urge New Delhi to bolster trilateral co-operation with Japan, the US's most important Asian ally. "India and the US should consider expanding their trilateral security cooperation with Japan," declared the US defense secretary. "We should have trilateral defense cooperation at the ministerial level."

Hagel's talks with Modi reportedly focused on strategic geo-political issues, including the situation in Iraq, where the US has resumed direct military intervention, and Afghanistan, where New Delhi, with Washington's support, has emerged as a pillar of the US-installed government.

India's BJP government has declared "modernization" of India's armed forces one of its principal objectives and signaled that it is eager to take advantage of the US offer of co-production and technology transfer deals, so as to counter China's growing military prowess.

The Indian Defence Ministry is said to be evaluating Washington's proposal for co-production of the Javelin missile and is close to finalizing a \$US1.4 billion deal to buy at least 22 US Apache and 15 Chinook helicopters.

Reporting on his talks with Hagel, Defence Minister Jaitley emphasized the importance of the BJP government's recent decision to increase the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) limit in defense-related industries from 26 percent to 49 percent, as this would facilitate co-production deals. "We look forward to work closely with the US in this regard," Jaitley said.

Hagel had already praised the "progress" India had made on FDI in the defence sector.

In his talks with Hagel, Modi reportedly stressed the importance of the US making good on its promises of "advanced technological transfer" in any military co-production deals. A press release from his office, said Modi has "underlined the importance of defense relations in the overall" Indo-US "strategic partnership" and his "desire to see progress in ... defense manufacturing" and "technology transfer," as well as expanded joint military

exercises and strategic studies.

According to the, *Economic Times*, "Modi's mantra is to attain self-sufficiency in defense manufacturing through joint development and co-production with countries like US, France and other interested partners besides existing cooperation with Russia."

While the BJP-led government and the Indian military-security establishment are anxious to take advantage of the US offer of military co-production, there are concerns that Washington will use its role as a supplier to the Indian military as leverage to make New Delhi toe its line on key strategic and geo-political issues.

India was long the target of US sanctions due to its nuclear program and during the negotiations and ratification of the 2006 Indo-US nuclear accord Washington repeatedly demanded that New Delhi lend support to its campaign against Iran as a condition for proceeding with the nuclear deal.

That said, big business and the military-security establishment were angered by the failure of the previous Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) to proceed with any of the co-production deals the US has offered under the DTTI. When Hagel had a roundtable session with India Inc. last Saturday evening, industry representatives complained that, in contradistinction to the current Modi-led government, the UPA kept the Indian private sector at a distance from the DTTI.

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