

The Challenge of India-US Security Cooperation to India's Tradition of Strategic Independence

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Abstract: In recent years, India-US security cooperation has accelerated, overall defense cooperation framework has become increasingly mature and has been continuously updated with the times. The scale of India's imports of weapons and military supplies from the United States has continued to expand, and India-US joint military exercises have deepened. Since the Modi government took office in 2014, it has signed two basic military cooperation pacts with the United States, paving the way for further upgrading the two countries' defense cooperation in the future. India-US counter-terrorism cooperation is starting from scratch and continuing to deepen, further expanding the contents of their security cooperation. India-US close security cooperation has had a serious negative impact on India's overall foreign strategy, especially its tradition of long-standing strategic independence. It has eroded material and institutional foundations for India's strategic autonomy, and deteriorated India's geostrategic environment, which is not conducive to realizing its dream of being a great power.

Keywords: India-US security cooperation, strategic autonomy, Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement

In September 2018, the defense and foreign ministers of India and the United States held 2 + 2 dialogue in which the two sides reached consensus on close defense cooperation. In particular, the formal signing of the highly sensitive Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) marks further cooperation between India and the

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United States. The status quo, future direction of India-US security cooperation and its impact on India's tradition of strategic autonomy are closely related to changes in global power and changes in geopolitical landscape. This paper analyzes the depth, range and future direction of India-US security cooperation as of the 21st century, and explores how India-US security cooperation can erode India's tradition of strategic autonomy.

Review of India-US Security Cooperation after the Cold War

Since the beginning of the 21st century, India-US Security Cooperation has started from scratch and become increasingly closer in the formation of the overall defense cooperation framework, with increased trade volume of military supplies, increasing frequency and depth of joint military exercises, and deepening counter-terrorism cooperation.

I. The overall defense cooperation framework is complete and constantly updated.

After the end of the Cold War, the Soviet Union, which was US main opponent and India's long-term ally, ceased to exist. With the two-block world no longer, biggest obstacle for India-US development in defense cooperation was thus eliminated. Meanwhile, with the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, cooperation between the United States and Pakistan in various areas including defense has dropped significantly, which is also a good opportunity for India-US military cooperation. Under this context, India-US defense cooperation gradually started. In January 1995, when US Secretary of Defence William Perry visited India, the two countries signed the Agreed Minutes on Defense Relations, proposing cooperation in weapons research and promoting military personnel exchanges. In 1998, India conducted nuclear tests, triggering a series of sanctions from the United States, including sanctions in the defense field. Since then, India-US defense cooperation has slowly recovered. In 2002, India and the United States signed General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), which paved the way for military intelligence exchange and required the two sides to shoulder the responsibility to protect each other's confidential information, thereby

leading to the establishment of the India-US overall defense cooperation framework.

In 2005, India and the United States signed a ten-year defense framework agreement that constitutes the basic framework for their defense cooperation. Under the framework of the agreement, the two countries set up a defense policy group to facilitate dialogue on issues of common interest and to determine priority areas of defense cooperation. In 2012, India and the United States signed the Defense Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI), aiming to break the barrier at the technocratic level so that top leaders of both countries could seek science and technology cooperation, in order to raise the level of defense cooperation to one as high as the two countries' strategic relationship and promote the cooperation from simple trading to joint research as well as development and production.¹ Under the framework of this initiative, India and the United States have established seven joint committees to discuss related combat platforms and technical cooperation, including next-generation personal protective equipment, mobile hybrid energy devices, aircraft engines, technologies related with aircraft carriers, future high-tech ground combat vehicles and future vertical take-off and landing platforms.² In 2005, the United States and India signed a ten-year defense framework agreement, emphasizing defense cooperation as an important component of strategic partnership and as a catalyst of strategic partnership. New contents such as bilateral joint action or joint participation in multilateral actions are put forward when the interests of the two countries are aligned. The leading role of the defense policy group in the field of bilateral defense cooperation is reiterated, and the transfer and joint development of defense technology will be promoted, especially in areas of high-end technology such as anti-missile equipment and aircraft carriers.³ In June 2016, during

¹ "US-India Defense Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI)," accessed July 18, 2016, <https://www.acq.osd.mil/ic/dtti.html>.

² The White House, "The United States and India—Prosperity through Partnership," June 26, 2017, accessed November 8, 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/fact-sheet-united-states-india-prosperity-partnership/>.

³ New Framework for the India-US Defence Relationship," accessed November 6, 2018, <https://idsa.in/resources/documents/Ind-US-Def-Rel-28.06.05>.

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Indian Prime Minister Modi's visit to the United States, the Obama administration elevated India to a Major Defense Partner, a status which would upgrade India's defense trade and technology transfer to the level of close allies of the United States, enabling India to obtain more advanced defense technology, while strengthening the Defense Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI).

II. Military trade has increased significantly from scratch, and India-US military exchanges have entered a budding state.

In military trade, since the 21st century began, India has gradually increased its purchasing of US-made weapons, with a total value of US\$19 billion. According to statistics, from 2013 to 2017, the United States has become India's second largest weapons provider¹, with equipment including P-8I multi-mission maritime patrol aircraft, C-17 military transport aircraft, C-130J transport aircraft, and armed helicopters. In addition, US arms companies intend to set up production lines for F-16 fighters and F-18 fighters in India. In July 2018, the United States gave India Strategic Trade Authorisation-1 status. US Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross said the move is an important step for the United States to change India's position in its export control system.² Traditionally, the United States has given this mandate only to countries within the four export control mechanisms (the Missile Technology control mechanism, the Wassenaar Arrangement, the Australia Group and the Nuclear Suppliers Group), but this time the United States gave India a green light. Currently India is the only South Asian country that enjoys such status, winning the same treatment as US allies like South Korea, Australia and Japan, which is bound to elevate India-US military trade to a new level.

In terms of military exchanges, the frequency and scale of Indian-US military exercises have been continuously improved, with unprecedented

¹ "US Narrows Gap with Top Supplier Russia, Arms Sales to India Soar 5-fold," March 17, 2018, accessed October 28, 2018, https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/us-narrows-gap-with-top-supplier-russia-arms-sales-to-india-soar-5-fold-118031700139_1.html.

² Andrew Korybko, "US Gives India STA-1 Status: Here's All You Need to Know about It," August 1, 2018, accessed October 27, 2018, <https://www.moneycontrol.com/news/business/us-gives-india-sta-1-status-heres-all-you-need-to-know-about-it-2790601.html>.

depth and range of exchanges. Up to now, India, not a US ally, has held the most joint military exercises with the United States. Annual military exercises involve various arms, with rich content, expanding scale, and growing cooperation, among which Indian-US personnel have a joint military exercise named Yudh Abhyas or preparation for war, the site of which is always at the Sino-Indian border or near the India-Pakistan border, with obvious targets and political intentions. Two India-US joint military exercises are named Cope India and Red Flag. The two sides have conducted in-depth exchanges on their main battle equipment and combat techniques. Malabar Exercise between the Indian and US navies has promoted cooperation to a new level. In 2007, naval forces of India, the United States, Japan, Australia and Singapore conducted joint exercises along the Malabar Coast. The five countries sent 20,000 officers and soldiers to participate in high-level complex exercises.¹ At present, this naval joint military exercise has been expanded from India and the United States to the trilateral cooperation of India, the United States and Japan, and may absorb Australia in the future. Joint military exercises are also frequently carried out between Indian and US Special Forces, especially highlighting joint counter-terrorism capabilities among the two military powers. In the future, India-US joint military exercises will continue to be upgraded. On January 11, 2018, US Ambassador to India Kenneth I. Juster openly called for a deep exploration of the strategic connotation of US-India relations immediately after he took office, proposing to strengthen exchanges between military academies and training facilities in the two countries, even to deploy liaison officers at the operational command headquarters. He also proposed that single service exercises be upgraded to tri-service exercises.² India and the United States hosted the

¹ Robert D. Kaplan, *Monsoon: The Future of the Indian Ocean and American Power*, trans. Wu Zhaoli, Mao Yue (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2013), 162.

² Sreemoy Talukdar, "US Seeks Deeper Military Ties with India: Government Must Leverage Donald Trump's Transactional Attitude to Foreign Policy," January 12, 2018, accessed August 11, 2018, <http://www.firstpost.com/india/us-seeks-deeper-military-ties-with-india-govt-must-leverage-donald-trumps-Attitude-to-of-the-Transactional-Foreign-Policy-4300189.html>.

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first round of 2+2 dialogue between foreign ministers and defense ministers, deciding to hold the first joint military exercises on the east coast of India in 2019.

III. India-US counter-terrorism cooperation is deepening and further expanding the content of security cooperation.

The United States suffered a major terrorist attack on September 11, 2001. In December of the same year, the Indian Parliament was attacked by terrorists. Common interests of India and the United States in counter-terrorism have prompted rapid development of counter-terrorist cooperation between the two countries. India has provided a lot of support for the United States to launch the war in Afghanistan, for instance, by providing an escort for the US fleet. The United States regards India as an important partner in the war on terror. In the same year, India and the United States set up the Counterterrorism Joint Working Group to cooperate in the exchange of terrorist financing information, joint border control training, surveillance technology and response to terrorist attacks. In November 2008, a series of terrorist attacks in Mumbai, India, killed more than 160 people, including 6 US citizens, which led to strengthened cooperation between the two countries in the field of counter-terrorism.

In recent years, counter-terrorism cooperation has become a major highlight of US-India security cooperation. The two countries have cooperated on counter-terrorism issues bilaterally, multilaterally and even through the United Nations with similar or identical stances. Potential and space for cooperation in the future is still huge. In 2010, India and the United States signed the Counter Terrorism Cooperation Initiative to promote active cooperation in counter-terrorism information exchange and counter-terrorism capacity. In 2014, facing cyber-terrorist threats to national security, India and the United States decided to set up a Homeland Security Subgroup under the bilateral High Technology Cooperation Group (HTCG), and committed to jointly promoting the development and application of counter-terrorism related technologies. In September 2015, India and the United States decided to upgrade their counter-terrorism cooperation to a decisive counter-terrorism partnership for the 21st century. Intelligence agencies from the two countries have close cooperation to

combat such organizations as Al-Qaida, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed, the Haqani Network and ISIS. On January 24, 2017, when Trump took office as president of the United States, he talked with Modi on the phone and expressed his willingness to join hands with India in combating terrorism. In June of the same year, Modi visited the United States and issued a joint statement after meeting Trump, reiterating how serious of a threat the world faces today, emphasizing continuous fighting against terrorist shelters. Their talk included demands that Pakistan ensure that its territory is not used as a staging ground for terrorist attacks against other countries, and that Pakistan bring those suspected terrorists and perpetrators of terrorist attacks in Mumbai and Patankot attacks to justice. Since then, the United States has declared Sayeed Salahudeen, the head of Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, to be a global terrorist. The United States also explicitly supports India's quest for the UN Security Council to list Maulana Masood Azhar, the head of Jaish-e-Mohammed in the alleged Patancot attacks, as a global terrorist. In December 2017, India and the United States held Counter-Terrorism Designations Dialogue in New Delhi, the capital of India. The mechanism aims to promote joint designation of terrorist organizations and individuals. The two sides agreed to strengthen information exchange in this regard, and discussed how to effectively pursue designations against terrorists. On March 27, 2018, the India-US Counter-terrorism Joint Working Group held its fifteenth meeting in New Delhi to assess global and regional terrorist threats, including cross-border terrorism in South Asia, share information about terrorist organizations and individuals, and exchange views on combating international and regional terrorist financing. In addition, the United States has assisted India under the framework of counter-terrorism assistance and trained a large number of counter-terrorist security personnel in India. The training program includes explosives monitoring and disposal, talks on kidnapping, and counter-terrorism legislation.

Three Major Military Cooperation Agreements

The upgrade of India-US security cooperation is reflected in the progress of military cooperation agreements between the two sides. In

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general, the United States signs three basic military cooperation agreements with its defense partners, namely the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), and the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA).¹ The US Department of Defense refers to the above three major agreements as the universal tools adopted by the United States to promote cooperation with partners in defense affairs. Up to now, India has signed two basic military cooperation agreements with the United States: the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) and the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA); additionally, India has continued consultations on signing the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) to promote further cooperation in defense affairs between the two countries.

In August 2016, India and the United States signed the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), which allows use of each other's military bases for replenishment and maintenance. Based on mutual benefit and reciprocity, the two countries can obtain military support other than offensive weapons through bookkeeping and other means. US fighters and warships can use Indian airports or ports when necessary. According to the Indian Ministry of Defence, the two armies will give each other wide ranging logistical support in designated ports, joint military exercises, joint training and humanitarian relief and mitigation operations. Both sides shall pay cash or provide equal support for food, water, camps, transportation, fuel, clothing, communication equipment, related accessories, medical care, warehousing services, and maintenance services.² The only agreement in Indian history with major

¹ The United States and partners signed a contract with a slightly different name but the same content, involving the use of each other's military bases for replenishment, maintenance and other logistics, the establishment of an encrypted communication network to achieve sharing of real-time data and geographic information, etc.

² Sushant Singh, "India, US Sign Key Defence Pact to Use Each Other's Bases for Repair, Supplies," accessed January 29, 2019, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/manohar-parrikar-signs-key-logistics-defence-pact-with-us-3004581/>.

powers with security cooperation content is the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation signed in 1971, which mainly highlights the strategic relationship between India and the Soviet Union and has few specific contents to implement military cooperation between the two countries. Therefore, the signing of the agreement between India and the United States is of great significance. In 2018, Indian officials stated that India notified the United States of standard operating procedures for the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), which applies to the Indian Army, Navy and Air Force, all of which have special liaisons responsible for implementing the procedures. Therefore, it is safe to say that the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) has come into force. In view of the Indian Navy's frequent visits to foreign military ports, joint exercises and training with foreign troops and humanitarian relief operations, therefore, it is India's navy that has benefited most from the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA).¹

In September 2018, India and the United States hosted the first round of 2+2 dialogue between foreign ministers and defense ministers reaching a series of cooperation agreements. The two sides reached a series of agreements on enhancing cooperation between the US Defense Innovation Organization and the Indian Defense Innovation Organization, establishing a hotline between the foreign ministers and defense ministers of the two countries, dispatching officers to US military headquarters, and reiterating the Defense Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) to promote joint research and development and production in the field of defense. However, the biggest achievement of this meeting was the signing of the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), which has sparked a heated debate in India, with both supporters and opponents. Among them, public opinion has it that the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) will bring certain benefits to India. First, the Compatibility and Security Agreement

¹ Dinakar Peri, "LEMOA Now Fully Operational," September 8, 2018, accessed January 29, 2019, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/lemoa-already-fully-operational/article24904359.ece>.

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(COMCASA) will provide a legal framework for the sale of sensitive communication equipment and related codes to India by the United States to ensure that the Indian army has real-time battlefield data. Second, the United States has the most advanced and secure communication equipment system in the world, and India will have the access to American-made communication equipment to enter the US huge intelligence information database. Third, Indian and US armies will use the same communication system in the future, which will enhance the interoperability of the two armies. Fourth, India can obtain military information about China and Pakistan from the United States.¹ In summary, the essence of the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) is to facilitate the real-time data sharing between Indian and US armies through secure communication channels, and to enhance the interoperability between Indian and US military equipment. Under the framework of the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), India can communicate with the United States (and other military partners that have signed similar agreements with the United States) through encrypted communication networks. In theory, once US warships and aircraft detect Chinese warships or submarines in the Indian Ocean, the information can be sent to the Indian Navy headquarters immediately through encrypted telecommunication channels if the United States wants to do so. Given the Indian strategic circle's concern about China, especially China's entry into the Indian Ocean, it is quite likely that India and the United States will cooperate.

Meanwhile, India can fully utilize existing US military equipment. The Indian military generally believes that the United States is a global leader in large-scale UAVs, anti-submarine warfare platforms, and is therefore eager to obtain the above equipment and related technologies. For a long time, US equipment purchased by India was often simplified versions, without the most advanced electronic components, especially

¹ "Seven Reasons Why COMCASA Is So Important for India," The Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), September 7, 2018, accessed January 29, 2019, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/seven-reasons-why-comcasa-is-so-important-for-india/articleshow/65707682.cms>.

precise global positioning systems and advanced guidance systems. For instance, P-8I long-range anti-submarine aircraft and C-130J transport aircraft that India previously purchased were not equipped with encrypted communication and data link equipment, so India was forced to equip them with less secure commercial communication equipment, while the same aircraft sold by the United States to other countries that have signed the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) are equipped with advanced data link systems. Therefore, the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) is a highly sensitive topic because it involves secure communications and interoperability promotion of military equipment between the two countries. The conclusion of the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) marks the further development of India-US defense cooperation at an unprecedented level.

As the third of the three basic military cooperation agreements between India and the United States, the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) aims to ensure that after signing the agreement Indian and US forces can unconditionally share geographic battlefield information obtained through all channels such as intelligence collection and satellite data. Moreover, the Indian army can obtain vast geo-spatial and aviation information from the United States, and then use it for navigation and target location. In December 2018, before visiting the United States, India's Minister of Defence Nirmala Sitharaman said the BECA is topping the agenda as this will allow exchange of geo-spatial information between India and the US for both military and civilian use.¹

India's Tradition of Strategic Autonomy Eroded by Cooperation with the US in Security Affairs

Since gaining independence in 1947, India has been striving to become a great and powerful country based on which a security and diplomatic strategy

¹ "BECA to Be Inked Soon between India & US? It is Topping Sitharaman's Agenda in US Next Week," November 29, 2018, accessed January 29, 2019, <https://www.financialexpress.com/defence/be-ca-to-be-inked-soon-between-india-us-it-is-topping-sitharamans-agenda-in-us-next-week-inbox-x/1398097/>.

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with Indian characteristics comes into being.¹ Although it varied in different historical periods, it is the most obvious feature of India's security and diplomatic strategy in different periods not to take sides with major powers and to thus maintain India's own diplomatic independence. With the purpose of checking China's rise for a certain period, the United States has strategically wooed India. In addition, India is a country with strong nationalism. Bharatiya Janata Party, without being influenced by Non-Aligned Movement of the Indian National Congress, has been in power since 2014. In the past India deliberately kept distance from big powers and avoided taking sides, while at present, India maintains that it is more conducive to its own national interests to keep a closer relationship with a particular power in a given situation. In a speech to the US Congress in June 2016, Modi said India and the United States are working shoulder to shoulder and will continue working together the same way.² India wants to obtain US help to upgrade its defense technology and jointly suppress Pakistan on counter-terrorism issues. The United States caters to India's needs and gradually erodes India's foundation of strategic autonomy by taking security cooperation as the key to accelerate the strategic tie-up.

I. The proportion of US military equipment in the Indian Army has been continuously increasing, and several key operational fields have gradually become subject to the United States.

India's military equipment are from various countries including Russia, Britain, France, Israel, as well as northern European countries and even the former Soviet Union. It not only reflects the backwardness of India's defense industry and limitations of Indian weapons and military supplies, but also is seen as a helpless action for Indian government to diversify imports so to avoid over-reliance on one specific country and thereby reduce its vulnerability. Over a long period, the Indian government

¹ Wang Hongwei, *Dangdai zhongyin guanxi shuping* [Review of contemporary Sino-Indian relations] (Beijing: Zhongguo zhangxue chubanshe [China Tibetology Press], 2009), 73.

² Jyoti Malhotra, "5 Takeaways from Modi's Speech to US Congress," June 9, 2016, accessed July 8, 2018, https://www.huffingtonpost.in/2016/06/09/modi-speech-us-congress_n_10369474.html.

has achieved its goal to a certain extent, despite huge expenditures spent on maintenance and compatibility. However, this situation has gradually changed due to the acceleration of India-US defense cooperation, with its focus on future combat trends, such as large combat UAVs that may transform air-to-air combat and air-to-ground attacks, and large transport aircraft embodying the strategic operational capability of the Air Force.

In June 2017, the US government approved the sale of 22 Guardian drones to India, worth more than \$2 billion. At that time, US-India negotiations were on the reconnaissance version of the aircraft. However, it was revealed that in the 2 + 2 dialogue between foreign ministers and defense ministers of the two countries that an all-in-one model capable of launching air-to-ground and air-to-sea attacks would be sold to India. If the sales agreement is reached, it will be the first UAV transaction between the United States and its non-NATO allies, and would mean the first appearance of such advanced combat UAVs in South Asia and its adjacent areas. According to US data, the UAV is mainly used for long-range maritime intelligence gathering, reconnaissance and strike missions. It is the most advanced marine drone in the world today.¹ Currently, other countries cannot produce such an advanced drone. Therefore, it is difficult for India to obtain non-US alternatives in this field. At the same time, Guardian drones also involve a set of complex control, transmission and other technologies, which are difficult to be made compatible with non-US weapons systems. In fact, the large-scale purchase of the aircraft by India is a great step towards US weapons system in future air and sea warfare, with increasing dependence on the United States, which is obviously contrary to India's original intention of pursuing strategic autonomy. It happens that there is a similar case: the Indian Navy is also equipped with the US P-8I Poseidon, long-range submarine-hunting aircraft, which could be used in conjunction with Guardian drones to enhance India's situational awareness in the Indian Ocean. The shortcomings and vulnerabilities of the Indian military's move are also obvious, especially, with the backwardness and

¹ "MQ-9B SkyGuardian," accessed November 6, 2018, http://www.deagel.com/Support-Aircraft/MQ-9B-SkyGuardian_a000517012.aspx.

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decommissioning of a small number of Ilyushin Il-38 submarine-hunting aircraft and Tupolev Tu-142M patrol aircraft purchased during the Cold War. In the future, Indian Army will rely almost entirely on US-made weapons systems for long-range intelligence collection, reconnaissance and attacks in the Indian Ocean region, which will inevitably lead India and the United States to be quickly bound together on security issues in the Indian Ocean, resulting the partial loss of India's strategic autonomy.

It can be predicted that with the continuous deepening of India-US defense cooperation and strategic tie-up, the long-standing defense partnership between India and Russia will face increasingly strong constraints and pressure from the United States. Russia would also worry about its most sophisticated military technology falling into the hands of the United States, and would therefore tend to be conservative in arms sales and technology transfer to India. This would lead to a continuous increase in the proportion of US-made equipment in the Indian military. Obviously, the prerequisite for India's strategic autonomy is its defense capability, and key areas representing future combat trends are first among those that cannot be restricted by other countries. With transfer of military technology as bait, the United States encourages India to continuously increase its procurement of US weapons, which gradually erodes India's material and actual basis of strategic autonomy.

II. India has signed a series of basic military cooperation agreements, especially the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), which potentially relinquishes all confidentiality to the United States.

Meanwhile, US government officials and think tanks repeatedly express their stance or write articles stating that signing a series of basic military cooperation agreements will not undermine India's strategic autonomy, obviously aiming to influence India's direction of public opinion, thus creating a relatively good atmosphere for the Indian government to sign the agreements. Considering that these three basic military cooperation agreements comprise standard procedure for defense cooperation between the United States and NATO as well as non-NATO military allies, in fact, the United States has listed India as an ally and the

Indian government is well aware of this. National Security Advisor Ajit Kumar Doval and India's Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar each visited China before the official signing of the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) in August 2016. One of the purposes was to assuage the agreement's influence on Sino-Indian relations. The Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) is more sensitive than the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement, which provides for mutual use of military bases. India will open the most sensitive government and military communications networks to the United States including India's Strategic Forces Command, which is responsible for nuclear weapons. In addition, the United States will also send special inspectors to Indian military bases to debug and inspect Indian military equipment based on the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement, which obviously runs counter to India's long-standing tradition of strategic autonomy. However, India ultimately failed to resist the temptation from the United States, with the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement as a prerequisite for Guardian drones equipped with an advanced global positioning system and advanced guidance system.

In addition, a lot of non-US main battle equipment is currently equipped in the Indian Army, such as Sukhoi fighters, Mikoyan MiGs, Kilo-Class Submarines, as well as many tanks and missile systems, which are not compatible with US communication hardware and software. In the future, communication compatibility issues among different types of weapon systems in the Indian Army will become more prominent.¹ While COMCASA will enable "inter-operability" with the US, it will damage "intra-operability" within the Indian armed forces!²

III. India-US security cooperation has impaired long-term cooperation between India and Russia, while India's strategic space is being increasingly

¹ Rajesh Soami, *COMCASA-Wind-Wane of Indian Foreign Policy?* National Maritime Foundation, June 28, 2018, 1.

² D. Raghunandan, "India Signs COMCASA: Risk Big, Low Returns," September 8, 2018, accessed October 1, 2018, <https://www.newsclick.in/india-signs-comcasa-big-risk-low-returns>.

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squeezed.

During the Cold War, India and the Soviet Union maintained friendly relations for a long time. Following the Cold War, the two countries have demonstrated many common interests in a series of bilateral and international affairs. India continues to keep close relations with Russia and attaches top priority to India-Russia relations. In October 2018, Modi praised India-Russia relations at the India-Russia Business Summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin, saying that a lot has changed and is still changing, but the friendship between India and Russia has never changed.¹ However, as India-US defense cooperation continues to upgrade, the relationship between India and Russia has been adversely affected, mainly reflected by Russia's drastic adjustment of its policy toward Pakistan, especially the initiation of Russia-Pakistan defense and security cooperation, and their different policies on the Afghanistan. Over a long period of time, while India deliberately maintained the same distance from the two superpowers, the United States and Russia competed to win over India without taking into account Pakistan's reaction. This situation will not exist with the deepening of India-US defense cooperation. The South Asian geopolitical pattern will undergo a significant adjustment.

A. There has been a historic breakthrough in defense cooperation between Russia and Pakistan.

Russia has long attached importance to India while ignoring Pakistan in its South Asia policy, and even refused to carry out any defense cooperation with Pakistan due to India's opposition. However, Russia has substantially adjusted its policy towards Pakistan following continual close defense cooperation between India and the United States. From September to October 2016, Russia and Pakistan held a joint military exercise named Friendship 2016, the first military exercise between the two armies, and one that couldn't be timed more intriguingly. In September 2016, a military camp in India-held Kashmir was attacked by armed forces. India

¹ Government of India, "Prime Minister's Address at India-Russia Business Summit, October 5, 2018," accessed October 3, 2018, <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/30472/prime+ministers+address+at+india+russia+business+summit+october+05+2018>.

accused Pakistan of training the militants who crossed the border, and demanded that Russia cancel military exercises with Pakistan to show Russian-Indian unity, to which Russia unexpectedly insisted on military exercises with Pakistan. India's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has repeatedly spoken about this, while strategists and journalists remain shocked. For a time, reports about India's loss of Russia were overwhelming.¹ Given that India had just signed the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) with the United States in August of the same year and agreed to open Indian military bases to the US under certain conditions, a privilege which the Soviet Union lacked during the Cold War, it would be easy to understand why Russia engaged in joint military exercises with Pakistan despite India's public opposition. In addition, Russia has approved the sale of 4 Mi-35 armed helicopters, and reached an agreement on the construction of natural gas pipelines from Lahore to Karachi along with other cooperation projects in Pakistan.

B. The camp of Russia and Pakistan is opposing to the other camp of India and the United states on the issue of counter-terrorism.

From latte stage of the Obama administration to the Trump administration, the United States has repeatedly accused Pakistan of remaining a terrorist shelter as part of a strategy to woo India. Insufficient willingness and strength among Pakistani authorities to fight terrorism has largely satisfied India's grounds for isolating, suppressing and discrediting Pakistan in the name of counter-terrorism. However, intensive cooperation between India and the United States on counter-terrorist issues, including those in Afghanistan, has brought about unexpected negative effects. This is mainly due to Russia's concern that US garrison troops in Afghanistan have long threatened its geopolitical interests. The more the United States fights terrorists, the more terrorists there are in Afghanistan, which arouses Russian dissatisfaction toward failed US efforts to achieve long-term peace and stability in Afghanistan, while ISIS has also taken advantage of the chaos to establish the Khorasan to expand its influence. Russia believes

¹ Nabarun Roy, "Is India Losing Russia?," October 27, 2016, accessed November 12, 2018, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/india-losing-russia-18208>.

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that unlike the Taliban, which is committed to rebuilding the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, the ISIS ideology is extreme and poses a serious threat to Central Asia and Russia. In December 2015, the Russian President's special envoy for Afghanistan, Zamir Kabulov, stated that "Taliban interests objectively coincide with ours.... Both the Afghan and the Pakistani Taliban have said they don't recognize ISIS and they don't recognize the ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as the caliph; that is very important." In December 2016, Russia's ambassador to Afghanistan Alexander Mantytsky conceded in December 2016 that Moscow maintained relations with the Taliban in order to ensure the safety of Russian citizens in Afghanistan.¹ Under this situation, Russia has continuously increased its involvement in Afghanistan, quickly approached Pakistan's appeals on issues such as promoting the peace process in Afghanistan and combating ISIS, and publicly expressed its support for Pakistan. In February 2018, Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Russia reiterated its support for Pakistan's counter-terrorism efforts and capacity building, which is in the interest of the entire region. On August 1, the Russian ambassador to Pakistan stated that Russia maintained close communication with Pakistan on counter-terrorism and strategic issues. On Afghanistan, he said Pakistan's role was important as well as Russia's and China's, the three countries were committed for a peaceful diplomatic Afghan-owned and Afghan-led solution to the issue.² The above statement by Russia clearly runs counter to India's intention of suppressing and discrediting Pakistan on the counter-terrorism issue, thus exposing their different policies towards Pakistan.

The Reactions of India and the United States

As for deepening security in cooperation between India and the

¹ Vinay Kaura, "Russia and Pakistan Align Their Afghanistan Policies," March 8, 2018, accessed November 9, 2018, <http://www.mei.edu/publications/russia-and-pakistan-align-their-afghanistan-policies>.

² "Russia Closely Collaborating with Pakistan on Counter-Terrorism, Strategic Issues: Envoy," August 1, 2018, accessed November 9, 2018, <https://nation.com.pk/01-Aug-2018/russia-closely-collaborating-with-pakistan-on-counter-terrorism-strategic-issues-nvoy>.

United States and its impact, there is a lot of concern within India and the United States. Currently, India's strategist circle, military, civil service system and political parties have begun to reflect on the challenges posed by security cooperation with the United States to India's strategic autonomy. On the signing of the three basic military cooperation agreements between India and the United States, the Indian National Congress, which has long adhered to non-alignment and strategic autonomy, criticizes the Indian government over the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA). When announced, the pact drew sharp criticism at home from the Congress which called it a "fundamental departure" from India's time-tested policy of "strategic military neutrality," while the CPM said the government had "compromised Indian sovereignty" and "surrendered strategic autonomy" by inking the pact.¹ In September 2018, The Politburo of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) issued a special statement about the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) claiming that the 2+2 dialog marks a further institutionalization of the strategic alliance between the Bharatiya Janata Party and the United States. Signing the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) illustrates the way the United States is getting the Modi government to intertwine India's armed forces with the Pentagon. Communications equipment provided to India to place in defense platforms will be monitored by the US. It will compromise India's defense communications network and obligate India to buy US defense equipment in the future. The Politburo demands that the Modi government cease such military agreements and stop the bartering of India's national sovereignty.² There are also voices within the Indian Army that the agreement has opened India's most sensitive and complex government and military communications network to the United States, which is detrimental to national security. In response to the US promise

¹ Sushant Singh, "India, US Sign Key Defense Pact to Use Each Other's Bases for Repair, Supplies," accessed December 22, 2018, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/manohar-parrikar-signs-logistics-defense-key-pact-with-us-3004581/>.

² "2+2: Binding India to US Interests," September 7, 2018, accessed January 29, 2019, <https://cpim.org/pressbriefs/22-binding-india-us-interests>.

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that information obtained from India's confidential communication network will not be shared with other countries without India's consent, proponents of this line of view have further called the BJP government "naïve and gullible" to buy into US assurances that the information gathered from Indian systems won't be shared with other countries.¹ On the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA), both the Indian Defense Research and Development Organization and the Indian Air Force have concerns over sharing Indian terrain mapping with the US and vice-versa.² In this context, in an effort to keep a diplomatic balance and to calm discontent in Russia and at home, India announced at the India-Russia Annual Bilateral Summit in October 2018 that it would acquire Russia's S-400 which is Russia's most advanced long-range anti-aircraft missile system.

The US government is well aware that there are voices within India opposing strengthened security cooperation between India and the United States. For this reason, they have tried their best to allay Indian concerns through various channels. India's Minister of Defense Nirmala Sitharaman visited the United States in December 2018, at which time he toured the US Indo-Pacific Command.

India and the US have agreed to accelerate defense and national security cooperation as Defense Secretary James Mattis, at a meeting with Indian counterpart Nirmala Sitharaman, asserted that the Trump administration sees no contradiction between strategic autonomy and strategic partnership.³ The United States has also seized on India's desire for recognition, repeatedly praising India in public. James Mattis said, "Today, I reiterate US appreciation for India's leadership as a stabilizing

¹ Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan, "The COMCASA Question in US-India Military Relations," September 4, 2018, accessed October 1, 2018, <https://thediomat.com/2018/09/the-comcasa-question-in-us-india-military-relations/>.

² Shishir Gupta, "US-built Chinook, Apache Helicopters for Armed Forces to Arrive in March," January 2, 2019, accessed January 29, 2019, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/us-built-chinook-apache-helicopters-for-Forces-to-Armed-arrive-in-March/Story-ETHSnxAxSoYC3LxoXef6QO.html>.

³ "No Contradiction Between Strategic Autonomy and Strategic Partnership: Mattis," December 4, 2018, accessed January 29, 2019, <http://news.statetimes.in/no-contradiction-between-strategic-autonomy-and-strategic-partnership-mattis/>.

force in pursuit of that vision, promoting peace and security across the region and the globe.”¹

At the same time, US authorities and strategic circles also expressed understanding about India’s attempt to avoid jeopardizing its strategic partnership with Russia when it collaborates with the United States in security, which is throwing a long line to catch a big fish. As for India’s purchase of Russia’s S-400 missile system, on the one hand, the United States implemented sanctions against Russia under Countering America’s Adversaries through Sanctions Act. Moreover, the purchase of Russia’s S-400 anti-aircraft missile system is the focus of the act.² Beyond diplomatic repercussions, in the longer term they worry, as House Armed Services Committee Chairman Mac Thornberry (Rep.) put it, the S-400 deal “will make interoperability harder.” Enhancing interoperability has been a major US-India effort over the last few years, with the two countries signing additional foundational agreements, negotiating others, and expanding their military exercises.³ On the other hand, US Congress authorizes the president to give a waiver to object to sanctions under given situations. Defense Secretary James Mattis has advocated for such a waiver, arguing that the punitive measures could hurt America’s burgeoning partnerships with countries like India, Indonesia, and Vietnam.⁴ Director of the India Project at the Brookings Institute, Tanvi Madan, said that the United States must avoid repeating mistakes made during the Cold War, which forced India to choose between US and Soviet arms. As a result, India’s defense system turned to rely on the Soviet Union after the 1960s. On the contrary, the United States should consider what kind of advanced weapons systems and related technologies it is willing to provide

¹ Ibid.

² “Both US and China Are Uncomfortable with India’s S-400 Missile Deal with Russia,” October 4, 2018, accessed October 28, 2018, <http://www.defencenews.in/article/Both-US-and-China-are-uncomfortable-with-Indias-S-400-Missile-deal-with-Russia-580903>.

³ Tanvi Madan, “Between a Cold War Ally and an Indo-Pacific Partner: India’s US-Russia Balancing Act,” October 16, 2018, accessed January 29, 2019, <https://warontherocks.com/2018/10/between-a-cold-war-ally-and-an-indo-pacific-partner-indias-us-russia-balancing-act/>.

⁴ Ibid.

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to India so that India can choose between the United States and Russian weapons systems.¹

In short, since the 21st century began, security cooperation between India and the United States has been continuously upgraded, overall defense cooperation framework is mature, value of military trade has approached \$20 billion, and joint military exercises have reached a new stage in frequency, scale and depth. In addition, of the three basic agreements needed for defense cooperation between the United States and other countries, India has signed the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) and the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), with only the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) to be signed. The two countries have already communicated on about signing the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA), which does not raise as many concerns as the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA). There is no insurmountable obstacle for the final signing of the agreement between the two countries. Overall, military cooperation between India and the United States has gradually eroded the material and institutional basis of India's strategic autonomy. It increased India's unilateral vulnerability to the United States in the fields of defense and national security. It has worsened the geopolitical environment of India and made the Indian strategist circle think about close defense cooperation with the United States and India's future foreign strategy following Bharatiya Janata Party's rise to power. In any case, the status of a great and powerful country that the Indian government and the strategist circle have been pursuing cannot be achieved by carrying out blind defense cooperation with the United States, forming an alliance with the United States, and acting as a military ally or partner of the United States.

(edited by Zhao Jinfu)

¹ Ibid.