

# India-US strategic partnership set for new high with deals & drills

## Delhi Ready To Ink 2 Military Pacts, Buy Choppers For \$3bn & Hold Joint Exercise

**New Delhi:** The strategic clinch with the US is set to get even tighter, with India signalling its readiness to ink two more bilateral military pacts, procure helicopters worth \$3 billion and participate in a joint tri-Service amphibious exercise for the first time.

Top government sources said "substantial progress" had been made towards finalising the Communications, Compatibility and Security Arrangement (COMCASA) and the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-Spatial Cooperation (BECA) between the two countries.

The previous UPA regime had stonewalled all attempts by the US to ink the three so-called "foundational military agreements" during its 10-year tenure on the ground that it would "compromise the strategic autonomy" of India. But the NDA government went ahead and inked the first one on reciprocal logistics support — Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) — with India-specific safeguards in 2016.

Now, the stage is being set for the other two, COMCASA and BECA, which the US contends will allow India more access to advanced military technologies and platforms

### MILITARY TANGO

#### Arms Supply

► US has bagged deals worth **\$15 billion** since 2007. These include: 11 C-17 Globemaster-III strategic aircraft; 13 C-130J Super Hercules planes; 12 P-8I maritime patrol aircraft; 145 M-777 ultralight howitzers; 22 Apache attack & 15 Chinook heavy-lift helicopters

► **Deals in pipeline** | 6 more Apache attack helicopters (\$930 million), 24 S-70B multi-role, anti-submarine helicopters (\$2 billion)

► **Projects under discussion** include F/A-18 or F-16 fighter production line in India for 110 jets for \$20 billion; supply of 22 MQ-9 Reaper or Predator-B



with encrypted communications like Predator-B and MQ-9 Reaper drones, as was earlier reported by TOI.

"The broad contours of COMCASA have been finalised... only some text-



drones; joint production of advanced infantry combat vehicles etc

#### Military Pacts:

##### 1) LEMOA

- Logistic support, refuelling & berthing facilities for each other's warships & aircraft
- No stationing of US troops on Indian soil
- India gets access to US bases like Djibouti, Diego Garcia, Guam & Subic Bay

##### 2) COMCASA

- US will be able to transfer high-tech avionics, encrypted communication and

based negotiations are left. The BECA draft is also under discussion. We have insisted on India-specific assurances, much like what was done in LEMOA, and a status on a par with the US' closest alli-

electronic systems

- US says COMCASA will boost "interoperability" & ensure secrecy of its C4ISR systems

- But US could track & snoop on Indian warships/aircraft equipped with such systems

##### 3) BECA

- US says will enable sharing of advanced satellite & topographical data for long-range navigation & missile-targeting
- But India has own satellite imaging capabilities
- Will involve US digital sensors to be positioned on Indian soil

es," said a source.

This comes ahead of the first India-US 'two-plus-two' dialogue between foreign minister Sushma Swaraj and defence minister Nirmala Sitharaman with their Ame-

rican counterparts, Mike Pompeo and Jim Mattis, in Washington on July 6.

Sources said the two countries had also decided to hold their first-ever mega tri-Service amphibious exercise to supplement the flurry of war games they already hold every year from the top-notch naval Malabar (with Japan as the third participant) to the counter-terror Vajra Prahar and Yudh Abhyas between their armies.

This will be only the second time India will deploy assets and manpower from its Army, Navy and IAF together for an exercise with a foreign country, after the Indra war games with Russia in Vladivostok last year.

The US remains keen to make further inroads into the lucrative Indian arms market, having already bagged deals worth \$15 billion over the last decade.

India, however, remains miffed with the new US sanctions regime called CAATSA (Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanction Act) that targets countries buying weapon systems from Russia. As reported earlier by TOI, India and Russia are working to get around CAATSA as they have new defence projects worth over \$12 billion hanging in the balance.